

Dragoon

Arc 8

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## Chapter 146: Friends and

“And. I’m. Saying. Why didn’t he invite me!?”

His ash blonde hair swept back, the tan skinned Eunius Diade had some ale in his system, making him more quarrelsome than usual.

“Don’t drag me into this! In the first place, that was a dragoon mission, and you had nothing to do with it!”

“Fighting an ancient weapon, and even Gaia’s mechanized unit! I wanted to join in on the fun.”

“Like I care!”

His silky blond hair grown out, Luecke Halbades sat across the table from his friend from his academy days.

Two other friends had suddenly returned from a mission, so they got together to drink.

That much was fine.

But Luecke and Eunius were the only ones around that round table downing their glasses.

Turning an eye to the nearby seats, there Rudel and Aleist were both at different tables, accompanied by their female encampments.

When looked upon from the side, both of them were surrounded by lovely ladies, but those around made sure to take their distance. There were even customers who left the shop.

That was simply how tense the restaurant’s air was.

“Eunius, if you want to know why you weren’t taken along, you can just ask those two.”

As Luecke sipped his drink and said that, Eunius reached his hand for a snack as he vetoed the notion.

“Like hell I can do that!”

Having just returned from the Kingdom of Celestia, Rudel Arses was a young man of silver hair and blue eyes.

He was currently surrounded by seasoned warriors of the Dragoon Brigade as he drank. It was quite accurate to say Rudel saw the woman affiliated with the dragoons as his idols.

Luecke looked at Rudel's enjoyable-looking table.

"The ones with him are Major Bennet, Cattleya Ninias, Lilim, Enora Campbell... a brilliant gathering of elite dragoons, that is."

While he said that with a hint of cynicism, ability-wise, those girls truly were elites.

Among the elite dragoons, it was as if they were chosen to be elites among elites.

Before the valorous dragoons putting checks and restraints on one another as they closed in on Rudel, the man in question was happily enjoying his meal.

Perhaps Izumi was in tune with those restraints as she spoke less than usual. Everyone at Rudel's table was smiling, but some part of it birthed a tingling tension.

It seems Rudel spoke of what happened in Celestia, at least to the extent he was free to speak on.

Bennet alone seemed innocently delighted at her subordinate's achievements.

(Compared to that, Aleist's table is...)

Luecke looked at the other pitiful table.

Aleist made a pale face, as he desperately explained how nothing happened with Nate-one of his harem members-while they were alone in Celestia.

Numerically, they were a greater gathering of beauties than Rudel's table, the number was more than double.

There were plenty of drunks at the bar, but no one even thought to pick a fight with the beauty-surrounded Aleist. More than that, they directed eyes of

pity.

A harem member from its early days, Seli took charge.

“And so, Alest-sama, you say nothing happened between you and Nate?”

His face increasingly pale, neither food nor drink passing through his throat, Aleist Hardie levelly answered the question.

Curling blond hair, mismatched eyes of blue and green... his features were of the beautiful sort, but some part of him gave off a most unfortunate air.

“Nothing happened. Nothing at all. I was able to get some sound sleep, so I preferred it over there. I want to return to Celestia.”

At the end, he leaked his true feelings, causing the other woman to barrage him with questions as well.

Eunius ate his meal as he looked between Rudel and Aleist’s table.

“When we just got together to drink, they came in one after the next and casually surrounded them. I’d like to have some stupid banter at least at times like this.”

Luecke shared the sentiment.

(Dammit! I wanted to consult with them on Lena! Read the mood, you lot!)

Unable to speak out against Aleist’s harem members or the warriors surrounding Rudel, Luecke downed his glass.

For some reason, Millia was present at Aleist’s table.

“Hey, I think I’m irrelevant. Can I go over there?”

As Millia pointed at Rudel’s table, her sister elf Lilim who heard that waved her hand.

Lilim, whose eyes were closed as per usual, waved with a smile. Seeing that, Millia felt just a little annoyed.

The store had specially prepared the table and chairs, there were quite a few people at Rudel’s table, and it didn’t look like it would fit anymore.

Eunius looked over the elven sisters.

“Looks like things are getting complicated over there.”

Luecke, to his friend who said such a thing.

“Over there as well, you mean. But what’s with these members... that blasted Aleist, he’s long since past ten. At the rate things are going, in a few years, I won’t be surprised with twenty or thirty.”

He sighed at Aleist’s ever expanding harem.

What was stranger than anything was the fact the man in question was in love with Millia, who had eyes for Rudel. At present, he had no desire for a harem.

In his student days.

At first he had admired harems, calling out to women, and wasting his efforts in futility. After losing an interest in a harem, he chased after Millia. And yet, from that point onwards, women began to gather around Aleist.

To the one in question, it was nothing more than a bother.

Eunius leaked his real feelings.

“As I thought, Harems are only fun to watch. I do feel jealous, but if you say I’ll turn out like Aleist, I’ll have to decline.”

Luecke was the same.

“My thoughts exactly. I can only handle one... no, if I had to, two at most. Yeah.”

While Luecke was zealous towards Rudel’s stepsister, given her status as an illegitimate daughter, he might not be unable to take Lena Arses as a legal wife.

Therefore, if he wanted her by his side by all means, she would be treated as a mistress.

Perhaps sensing Luecke’s feelings, Eunius spoke tiredly.

“And is that one Lena? You really are... well, I guess you’re better off than when you were a straight-laced asshole.”

“Don’t stick strange names on me!”

Luecke found himself being teased, but there he heard Bennet’s voice.

“Eh, no... I mean, I’m the one who graduated first.”

At Bennet’s great fluster, wondering what had happened, the two of them quietly observed. Rudel explained with a smile.

“What are you talking about, Major? You’re the same age as us. Those born to the wolf tribe are considered to be one year old at birth, with age counting up every New Year, right?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“You were born in the twelfth month, right?”

“No, I was definitely smaller than those in my year, they always called me small, but...”

Bennet looked anxious.

“You became two soon after birth, and enrolled in the academy at the same age fifteen as us, right? But that means you were actually thirteen. When you graduated on the two year course, you were fifteen, so you should be younger than Lieutenant Cattleya.”

Bennet blankly opened her mouth and looked at Cattleya. Cattleya didn’t seem very amused.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m the older one. What’s more, I’m a lieutenant, a lower ranking officer!”

Seeing Cattleya down her drink all at once, Bennet started making excuses.

“I-I mean no one ever told me I was supposed...”

Perhaps the drink had put Rudel in a good mood.

“That’s got nothing to do with it. I mean, you’re a Major. Even if you’re not her direct commanding officer, you’re still her superior!”

Bennet’s ears standing sharply upwards drooped miserably as her face turned red and she hung her head. Covering her face with both hands, her tail began to quiver.

“... When I’m the younger one, I’m sorry for acting condescending. I’m sorry for sticking a -chan on your name. From here on, I’ll call you senpai. I’m sorry.”

When she said such a thing, Cattleya snapped.

“If a Major talks to me like that, I’ll just be troubled.”

Lifting up her orange hair, Enora to Rudel.

“Looks like our commanding officers have it rough. Rudel, you want to train together next time? You’ll be in the capital a while, right?”

To Enora who asked in a fawning voice, Rudel crossed his arms and looked at the ceiling.

“I think that’s possible, but...”

There, Lilim to Enora.

“Yey, brigade member over there! What are you trying to make him promise in the confusion?”

There, Enora spoke with a face of leisure.

“My apologies. I mean, it looks like our superior officers are all busy, and this is the special privilege of his peer in rank. See, me and Rudel are peers.”

Lilim gripped the cup in her hand so hard one wondered if it might break. Looking over that, Rudel spoke.

“Izumi, is it alright for me to participate in training?”

Izumi, who had kept careful watch, made an expression as if to say, don’t turn this towards me.

Enora spoke.

“Rudel, why are you checking it order with Izumi-san? Let’s just let the two of us...”

Rudel smiled.

“No, Captain Oldart told me, ‘You should never take any action on your own,’ after all. He sounded really disheartened, so breaking those words all of a sudden is a bit...”

It seems the problem with Celestia had the higherups whittle the captain away quite a bit.

As Izumi possessed the title of special inspector, Rudel sought confirmation with her.

Surrounded by these valorous members of the dragoons, Izumi responded.

“No, as long as you’re acting alongside other dragoons, I think it should be fine...”

Unable to endure the pressure from Cattleya and Lilim, Izumi spoke nothing more than the truth. Enora heard those words and lightly clenched her hand in victory.

Seeing that, Luecke muttered.

“Looks like they’re enjoying themselves more than at Aleist’s table.”

He gave his honest opinion.

Eunius agreed.

“Only in comparison, that is.”



Only a few hours after the drinks with the female camp began, were Rudel’s group able to slip out of the pub, flee into a back alley, and drink in peace at a stall.

As if rehearsed, the four of them went up together to pay the tab and slipped out of the back door.

While they did feel bad about it, from the start, it was intended as a drink among men.

Removing their upper coats, the top few buttons of their shirts opened, the four raised their glasses.

“It’s that. As I thought, it’s nice to take it easy and just have a drink between men.”

On that statement from Rudel, Luecke spoke in surprise.

“What’s this, you were actually able to read the mood? Well, sure enough, if you asked me to drink in that sort of atmosphere...”



“No, so... it’s good to be surrounded by women you admire, but you’re always mindful of them, or how should I put it.”

Mindful, Rudel put it. With an amazing smile, Aleist strongly slammed down his glass of ale on the table.

“You’re lying. I saw how much fun you were having! My stomach was grating, and I could feel all the blood leave me, you know.”

Seeing Aleist on the verge of tears, Eunius gave a grand laugh.

“You reap what you sow. And the numbers keep steadily increasing even after you’ve graduated. So are you still after Millia?”

Not at his drink, Aleist’s face reddened at the topic Eunius brought up. Teasing the easy-to-understand Aleist, Eunius reached for the food.

The food wasn’t anything refined, but even so, the atmosphere was much better than that pub from before, making everything naturally taste better.

“Oh, this isn’t half bad.”

As he said that, Luecke reached out a hand as well.

“Then I don’t mind if I do. More importantly. Rudel, your little sister... I’m not talking about Lena, this is about Erselica. She came to my place asking around.”

Sipping his drink, Rudel made a surprised face. While Rudel and Erselica were siblings, it was hard to say they got along.

Unlike his stepsister Lena, he never really talked with Erselica Arses.

“That’s rare, perhaps? I’ve heard some things from Lena, but I’m relieved she’s not moping around anymore.”

He said with a swig. Rudel,

“It was while I was having some tea with Lena. She asked me various things about the factions, but do you know her intent?”

Perhaps worried for her, Luecke made a serious face.

Rudel had no idea what Erselica was trying to do.

“Who knows? I haven’t heard anything.”

“I see,” said Luecke, leaving his glass on the table to look at Rudel.

“There have been some unsettling movements in the palace as of late. Especially around Princess Aileen... it was the same when we were at the academy, but I don’t know what she’s planning this time.”

Aileen Courtois had some connection to Rudel’s group. Of course, that was only through her favorite young man called Fritz.

Of common descent, Fritz was a knight hailing from the territory governed by the Arses House.

By Aileen’s work, he was also the captain who commanded the royal guard.

He held an emotion close to hatred towards Rudel, and often stood against him in their student days. But Rudel himself didn’t care about it all too much.

“The princess, eh. Come to think of it, Fina’s about to graduate, isn’t she?”

It was time for the second princess Fina Courtois to graduate the academy. To Rudel, that relation was the more important one. Not as man and woman, she was his disciple who pursued the means to pet a dragon by his side.

Hearing of Fina, Aleist joined in on the conversation.

“Graduation... eh. What do you think I should do? How should I put it, there are some new recruits scheduled to join my platoon, but they’re all women.”

At Aleist who butted into the conversation, Eunius shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

“I thought it might be more elegant than nothing but men, but after seeing that, I don’t want any part.”

Luecke was, meanwhile, laughing.

“I’ll have to agree.”

Rudel looked at Aleist.

“The defenders have it rough. Rather, isn’t it strange that the female knight ration is only skewed around Aleist? I’m sure they’re all proficient, but Aleist is the only man there.”

Looked on from the side, it was a vibrant workplace where he was

surrounded by women.

That was Aleist's station in a knight brigade called the defenders. Within that, Aleist was the head of a platoon.

Of course, all he ever did was clean the palace.

"I can't take it anymore! It's grating on my every day, and the talks are all going in strange directions! No one ever listens to my opinion, yet they still come to me to hear it out! What's that supposed to mean!? Asking me who's my number one, don't bring out those questions that only make things worse! They all know my number one is Millia, dammit!"

The drink getting to him, Aleist's tensions were rising.

Eunius poured ale into Aleist's cup as he grinned.

"Hmm, the black knight has it tough. And from the look of it, you're getting more female knights? I'd be envious if I didn't know any better."

Aleist instantly downed the refilled ale.

Taking a few deep breaths after drinking it, he vented the anger he was usually storing up.

"Envious? Then switch out with me! This personnel assignment is definitely the doing of someone with a grudge towards me! What's with this, what did I do to deserve this?"

Rudel also drank some ale as he spoke.

"I get the feeling you were thirsting for women at the start..."

There, Luecke snapped his fingers and nodded.

"Come to think of it, my image of you running around's grown too strong, but Aleist, you really were terrible before that. You're easy to talk to now, but back then, I wouldn't even think of approaching you unless you had some ale in your system. Ah, come to think of it, he used to sound so full of himself."

As Luecke reminisced and nodded, Eunius reached for the food, a tired look on his face.

"You're the one who changed. What's this? Saying whatever you want about

noble obligations, you're getting all heated over Rudel's sister. Have you forgotten how you made a misunderstanding and challenged me back at the academy?"

Luecke was earnest in his student days, no... he was so earnest he let off an air that made people distance themselves.

He and Eunius were like cat and dog, leading along their followers to snarl at once another. From the start, both their houses held the top spots in the factional wars, with enough reason and history to hold a feud.

But like this, the two of them now drank together at the food stalls.

Aleist recalled how he was when he enrolled at the academy, poured himself another glass and downed it at once before looking at Rudel.

"You say that, but I think the one who changed most was Rudel. In the first place, I always thought you were strange from the first time we met."

Rudel tilted his head.

Luecke and Eunius shook their heads and received some water from the man running the stall. Pushing that water onto Aleist, they seemed deeply concerned.

Eunius,

"The one who changed the least was Rudel, right? Going on about dragons and dragons from dawn to dusk, and after graduation, it's still dragons all the way down. You've got to respect that."

Rudel acted a little bashful.

"You think so?"

Sparingly sipping his ale, Luecke cautioned Rudel.

"Eunius wasn't praising you. But I have to agree Rudel hasn't changed. Changing so little in the time since we met, isn't that actually amazing? Rather, when I heard him talk about how he was really going to become a dragoon, looking back on it now, I'll say it, but I thought it sounded stupid."

Eunius agreed as he drank.

“Yeah, me too. I thought it was interesting but definitely impossible.”

Aleist also nodded.

“Yeah~, I remember that. No one thought you’d make it. You surprised me too.”

The drink getting to Rudel again, his face turned a little red.

“Aren’t you being terrible? No, but my probability of becoming a dragoon was considerably low. I couldn’t get the rights to meet a grey dragon, and my screening forms were...”

Seeing Rudel begin to think to himself, Eunius pat him on the back. That hurts, Rudel said as he looked at Eunius.

“You’re a dragoon now, so don’t worry about it. Even so, it really was fun. Going to matches, cutting at one another, bashing each other’s faces in.”

“Yeah, I remember a whole lot of smacking.”

Luecke looked at Eunius and Rudel nodding and reminiscing, and made a truly incomprehensive face.

“You muscleheads.”

And the one staring intently at a tired Luecke was Aleist.

“No, aren’t you the same, Luecke? You butted heads with Eunius over the duel, right? I’ll just say it, but just switching out fists for magic doesn’t change much in the grand scheme of things. From my point of view, you’re all the same sort. Plain old battle maniacs!”

Eunius stood from his chair and pointed at Aleist.

“Don’t screw with me! You also exchanged blows with Rudel! What’s more, not winning by a paper-thin margin, the only time you ever won was the first time!”

In his matches with Rudel, Aleist only ever won once.

In his first match after enrolling at the academy, Rudel lost to Aleist.

Perhaps recalling that, Rudel seemed delighted.

“And after that, I’ve got two wins and one draw. Man, both those matches I just barely got through, and we were carted off to the infirmary every time.”

Aleist pulled back.

“Why do you sound so happy? You’re the only one who gets hospitalized enough to get a reserved bed in the sick room.”

Eunius spoke loudly as if recalling.

“Come to think of it, his majesty came too! Back then, we were so frantic to lower our heads through our injuries! Thinking back on it now, you think he would’ve burst out like that if we were in public?”

Aleist cried out.

“That was lese majeste, you hear! Really, just don’t! Rather, I didn’t know about that one...”

Luecke put down his glass with a serious face.

“The truth is, I’ve had to go and lower my head to him quite a few times...”

Aleist held his head.

“Why!? I thought you were the most decent, but why!?”

Rudel addressed Aleist.

“Don’t mind it. I’ve been cautioned more times than I can count, but I’m still just fine!”

Aleist looked to be on the verge of tears.

“You’re not fine at all! Why are you still a problem child after graduation!? Hey, let’s act a little more grown up.”

Looking at Aleist, the three laughed.

Aleist began to laugh as well.

Hitting glasses together, the four of them talked and reminisced over their student days, drinking the night away.



In a room of the palace, the first princess Aileen took a single document in

hand.

Confirming its contents in that dark room, she set it ablaze and tossed it in the fireplace for it to burn through.

The document that instantly burned away, it detailed that the plan Aileen brought forth was at a stage where it could be executed.

The sender was an enemy nation, the Gaia Empire.

The knights on standby in the room gazed at Aileen with nervous faces.

And turning away from the fireplace, Aileen directed a smile to those knights.

“Could you call Fritz here? Things are going to get busy, so I’ll have to start preparing.”

Under Aileen’s orders, one of the knights left the room.

The first princess was of a kind heart, a beautiful princess.

Despite being of the royal family, she held antipathy towards the corrupt nobility and made her favorite commoner knight Fritz into the captain of the royal guard.

And in order to see Rudel’s mortified face, she even granted a gray dragon to Fritz.

In the Kingdom of Courtois, dragons were a valuable war asset. The knights who rode them needed to be elites.

In order to obtain their own dragons, there were knights who sought out wild ones. But even those knights couldn’t enter the lands the dragons lived without the kingdom’s permission.

Without treading into any of those procedures, a gray dragon managed by the country-born and raised in Courtois, it was smaller than a wild dragon-was granted by Aileen unto Fritz.

The young captain of the royal guard, and the young man who obtained a dragon, receiving such special treatment from Aileen, Fritz did have his dissatisfactions.

It could not be said he lacked any talent.

The young man called Fritz definitely did have talent and strength. But for surrounding eyes, that wasn't enough.

Just in his own generation, starting with the White Knight Rudel, there was the Black Knight Aleist, then Eunius and Luecke, the four with strength and fame towering over the rest.

They graduated the academy together, they started work as knights together. Speaking to position, Fritz was far above any of them.

But Fritz was no noble.

In regards to Rudel's group that all possessed, Aileen thought that might be another large reason her Fritz was looked down upon.

From within the room, one of the knights asked Aileen.

"Princess, from here on, we will be..."

Aileen nodded with a smile.

"Yes, we will be at war. But don't worry. For the empire has agreed to fall back in exchange for a designated portion of land. And there won't be just one battlefield. Once the Gaia Empire lays hand on fertile soil, they will be satisfied."

Unlike the abundant lands of Courtois, the Gaia Empire lay on an exceedingly harsh terrain. For that sake, they had challenged Courtois time and again for their soil.

Aileen was a lover of peace.

But...

"On top of falling back after obtaining a portion of land, we will be able to tie friendly relations for times to come. This will be our final battle with them."

... No matter how dearly she held it, she had absolutely no talent. Her little sister Fina had talent in the field, her little sister Fina knew the reality.

But Aileen was different.

Raised sheltered within the palace, she grew up without ever learning how such things worked. She honestly believed the world was gentle and just, she had no doubt the other party would honor their promises.



“With this, Fritz-sama will surely obtain social status. And a better future will come upon Courtois.”

The knights held anxiety towards Aileen’s joy. But they wouldn’t try to stop her. The reason being, Courtois had never once lost to the Gaia Empire.

The dragoons never lost on the battlefield.

To that point, the powerful existences called the dragons had protected Courtois time and again. From the point of view of the knights, they were sure this wouldn’t lose this time either.



The Gaia Empire.

His blonde hair that grew to his shoulders swept back, a young man stood.

High in stature, he boasted a trained body. And in his hand, he gripped a single document.

Askewell Gaia...

A prince of the empire, if he was on the battlefield, it was said they were sure to win. The empire’s hero.

A girl called Mies Licorise nervously watched over his state. Her long, blonde hair curled at the tips.

Of small build, she was useless as a fighter, but she had come to assist Askewell as a researcher. And her research was finally to see the light of day.

To her side, a pale, slim, old man, Reole, mumbled something in a small voice. Perhaps thinking of his hatred towards the folks who never recognized his magic, perhaps hitting on a new magical discovery entirely, he gave a low chuckle.

When looked at from the side, he looked like a limitlessly dangerous man, but even like that, a proficient magician of the Gaia Empire. No, perhaps it should be said he had been too proficient.

The past tense was what suited him most. Discarding his family name, and calling himself the archwizard, Reole was a strange, one, but he was a man

Askewell recognized.

On Mies' opposite side stood a general who'd climbed his way up.

Ban Lochuas stood on many a battlefield with enemy countries, swinging his battleax and burying many an enemy.

Whether it be man or monster, as long as they stood before him, they would be cleaved in two.

He wore full armor over his muscular body, a well-ordered beard as his trademark around his mouth, the general was subordinate to Askewell.

Ban spoke to his leader.

"Have the cowards of Courtois moved yet? They really are taking this easily."

Letting out a light chuckle, Reole made light of Courtois.

"When they haven't offered what we desire, they're nothing but fools for believing in such an agreement. Or could it be they plan to crush us with dragons once we march to invade? That sounds interesting. I need only burn the dragons to death with my magic. Kihihhi!"

Mies broke into a cold sweat.

For this looked to be too unworthy an assortment to follow the rule of one of a prince like Askewell. But there was no doubt they were proficient.

Askewell turned his eyes to the documents as he spoke to Mies.

"Are the preparations in order, Mies?"

"Y-yes! We can move at any moments! We have already started limiting their food, increasing their brutality, and if I may speak to the contrary, it will be dangerous if we keep them on standby any longer."

What Mies had prepared.

It was an army of black monsters. Starting with ogres, they had even prepared wyverns as a countermeasure for the dragoons.

Their knights had already begun training to ride the wyverns she produced.

To that point, they had been one-sidedly attacked from the sky, and with all

the losses under its belt, when it came to invading, the Empire couldn't help but take every caution.

And Askewell...

"My brother said he wished to borrow the wyvern unit. If father accepts those conditions, then it can be said we will be attacking on two fronts. Come so far, I've no intent to refuse, but what numbers should I send around to them?"

While Askewell showed a clear lack of motivation as he asked Mies, he had his reasons.

Of all else...

"The Wyvern unit is it? If it's to hold down the dragoons... they might need three hundred. In that case, the number we can bring along ourselves drops to two hundred."

Askewell laughed.

"That's plenty! The Gora's preparations are ready. I'll give him however many wyverns he wants. But my brother truly has a faint heart. When I said I'd lend him Gora, he readily declined."

While Askewell gave a grand laugh, to the people of the Empire, the monster known as Gora were nothing but fear itself.

A normal army couldn't hope to win against one, what's more, their large form and uncanny appearance. They boasted four arms, and when strengthened, they even sprouted wings.

Even with the techniques to control them, they were nothing more than a source of fear when too close.

Standing to his feet, Askewell crushed the document in his hand and made a serious face.

"... Henceforth, we will be going to take Courtois. Trample them down, and attain plentiful land for the empire. I don't know what idiot set this up, but if they intend to catch us in their trap, we'll rip them away and make them regret it."

Mies swallowed her breath, the two on her side laughed.

Thinking Askewell was serious, some part of her wished the researcher he once told her about would come back.

Gentle.

Thinking of the people of the empire, doing his best to bring fertility to their lands, or to secure a source of food, the Askewell of his younger days.

But his research was nothing but failures, and once he was forced to the battlefield, in contrast to his research, he found nothing but success. He won and he won and got around to being called the hero of the empire.

The man in question, as long as it was for the empire's sake, didn't care if he was a military man or hero, he intended to fulfill his role. And the conclusion Askewell had finally reached...

"We will be invading Courtois! Prepare to depart!"

... To steal fertile soil from the people of Courtois, and save the people of the empire.

## Chapter 147: The Country or the People

The palace of the Kingdom of Courtois was driven to react to the activity shown by the Gaia Empire.

While the matter with Celestia had them in a hurry about awarding medals, in order to deal with the sudden movements of an enemy country, a meeting had been opened.

King Albach looked at the lines of ministers and yelled.

“What is the meaning of this!? For what reason has such a report not been raised to this point!?”

There, one of the ministers jovially laughed as he spoke.

“Now, now, your highness, please keep it at that. We’ll just have to put the dragoons to work. We can decide who’s responsible later and replace them. We need to prepare for the ceremony.”

Albach lowered his fist on the table.

“What idiocy do you speak of!? Why are we making light of our foe!? Just how much of our blood do you think Gaia has made flow? How can you declare the enemy will repeat the same actions as before!? Where is all the information!? I know we have more than enough forts stationed at the border!”

As no report was ever raised, the country was unable to put up any decent countermeasures. Sensing some ill intent, Albach glared at the ministers.

But Courtois had never lost before.

The reason being they had the strongest dragoons. As long as they were there, even if casualties came out, they would surely never lose, the ministers were certain of it. At the same time, Courtois’ land was bountiful, leading to a lowered sense of crisis.

“What are you doing!? We must investigate, send scouts...!”

Holding his chest, Albach wiped sweat from his forehead. On top of a pain in his chest, his voice wouldn’t come out. Breathing took all his might, his dizziness

wouldn't allow him to stand any longer.

"Y-your majesty!"

Those nearby approached him, and the meeting was put on hold.

Albach thought.

(Don't just close it there, fool. Someone take command in my place... anyone!)

As his consciousness grew distant, Albach felt something black and squirming moving in a corner of the room. But Albach lacked the means to confirm if it was really there.

His voice sealed, from his chest pains, he couldn't move.

With the king unable to do a thing, Courtois was thrust into a state of war.



Fina Courtois.

She awaited her graduation ceremony.

She had acquired all the required elective and class credits, there were no problems with her graduation.

As the second princess of Courtois, Fina had achieved excellent grades, but... with bags under her eyes, she sipped coffee as she looked at the blinding morning sun.

"... The night has let up again."

The one who built similar bags under her eyes, with her violet hair ruffled up, her glasses out of place, was a woman called Sophina.

Fina's exclusive guard, at present she was a commanding officer of the declining order of high knights.

Regardless of the fact she was in a school dorm, Fina's room luxuriously spread out. In such a room, the floor was littered with documents, and a demi-human of the white cat tribe was pitifully collapsed.

"Don't give me that, the night has let up schtick! Your school days are about

to end buried in a sea of paperwork, princess, are you really okay with that?”

Her expressions unchanging from the time of her birth, Fina expressionlessly made a fist and stuck up her thumb.

“I have no regrets. I’ve made a friend in Mii, fluffed up so many comrades, I was able to meet my master... I’m so happy I think I’m going to go crazy.”

While expressionless, her delight was the real thing. Sophina lamented over whether it was really alright for her master to rejoice over such a thing.

“Let’s make some better school memories while we still can! You’re the only one chased around your room by government papers!”

The bags under her eyes were deep, the ink staining on her hands was terrible. But while Fina was expressionless, she gave off an air as if she had received enlightenment.

“A lifelong friend and a master, what more can I wish for? Once this is over, I’ll be satisfied just with controlling the country from the shadows. Right, to one day raise the status of demi-humans, I’ll get my hands on all the strings!”

“You really are the worst.”

At the sound of Sophina bursting into tears, her subordinates entered the room. They were the subordinates of a high knight, but the problem lay in that Sophina’s subordinates would not enter the room over an exchange of that level.

“What happened?”

Their faces were the epitome of severity. Sophina turned her face serious as well as she sought confirmation.

One of her subordinates spoke.

“Captain, a messenger has come from Aileen-sama. We were told to return Fina-sama to the palace at once.”

Hearing that, Sophina turned to look at Fina.

She had finished her coffee, and breathing a sigh, Fina looked at the collapsed white cat Mii.

“... Let me put Mii to sleep. I’ll get myself ready, so could you please tell them to wait?”

But the female knights brazenly entered the room. This attitude against Fina was a great discourtesy, and on top of that...

“Second princess, Aileen-sama is waiting at the palace. You needn’t prepare anything. Please make for the carriage at once.”

Fina stood from her seat, placing the cup in her hand on her desk.

“I cannot leave my good friend like this. I’ll put her to sleep on my bed, you could at least give me time for that.”

There, one of the intruding knights let out their voice.

“A demi-human as a friend? It’s because they let you attend this academy that it came to this.”

While she heard those words, Fina carried herself calmly. The captain of the knights who came in thought a bit before nodding and approving of Mii’s transfer to the bed.

Fina issued the orders, and Sophina lay Mii down.

And...

“Well then, high knights, you will be leaving your weapons behind.”

On that further demand, Sophina’s eyes went sharp.

“What is the meaning of this? This is almost as if...”

... Almost as if we’re being apprehended, as Sophina tried to say it, Fina quieted her down.

Walking up before the captain of the knights, she spoke.

“You’re a knight of the royal guard. Very well, take me where you will. But will you provide an explanation of the situation?”

The knight spoke.

“Aileen-sama will personally do so at the palace.”

Meaning there wouldn’t be any explaining along the way.



(Ah man, so she's finally made her move. That's a bit earlier than I thought. My preparations aren't even complete yet.)

Thinking she hadn't made it in time, Fina had Sophina and her subordinates disarm themselves before leaving the room.

A while later, once everyone was gone, Mii lifted herself from the bed with a pale face.



Meanwhile.

In the palace, leading her knights, the first princess Aileen showed a smile of leisure before the king and queen.

The king was holding his chest, he tried to rise from the bed, but perhaps he couldn't get any power into his body, as he was failing miserably.

The doctor restrained Albach with a desperate look on her face, the queen threw the fan she usually carried at her daughter.

The one who cut that fan down was Fritz, captain of the royal guard.

Brown hair, wearing the uniform of the royal guard, he made a slightly pale face himself.

The queen cried out.

"Aileen! Do you know what it is you're doing!?"

The queen who usually spat cynicism yet remained unperturbed was enraged. The king remained immobile, his disturbed breath causing him to keel over.

Aileen opened her mouth.

"I do. If father cannot move during this great crisis, then someone will have to take his place. The Gaia Empire is making its move. We will have to erect countermeasures of our own."

The queen's expression wasn't directed at her daughter, she sent it to Fritz standing by her side.

"So the princess of our country has been deceived by a single man... I never liked you, but I never thought you would go so far."

As the queen voiced her displeasure towards Fritz, Aileen flew into a rage.

“What do you mean by that!? Fritz-sama is my splendid knight! If you mean to insult him, then even my mother will have no mercy from me.”

As the knights readied their weapons, the knights around the king took their weapons in hand as well. With many knights of the royal guard around, to look at the numbers, they were surrounded.

Aileen continued on levelly.

“Just watch on from here. The day Courtois is reborn anew... where status doesn't matter, I shall show you the actualization of a world where everyone lives equally.”

On those words, the queen.

“I don't see you capable of accomplishing such a thing. You'd do well to learn, even if you do something like this, no one will recognize you! The rumors will all say Albach's ailment was surely your doing. The times will resent you.”

Albach had collapsed from mysterious illness, even the royal physician was unable to treat him.

Aileen had gone on the offense. Albach had two daughters, Aileen and Fina.

Restraining her mother the queen, she had made preparations to restrain Fina as well.

“... Mother, once everything is over, I'll release you. Fina as well. That child is my sister. From here on, I want her to live more freely.”

Hearing that, the queen laughed.

“Aha ahahaha! Aileen, you're under a misconception.”

At the queen's words, the knights looked at Aileen. Holding them back with a hand, Aileen conversed with her mother.

“A misconception? What do you mean by that?”

“It's simple. You misunderstand who Fina is. That child properly understands it. Though it seems you've taken a liking to moving in the shadows. The talks of your marriage with Aleist... do you know who it was that brought it forward?”

Aileen looked between Fritz and the queen's face.

"So you mean to tell me that child did such a thing."

The queen spoke to Aileen.

"I'm sure there won't be a next time so remember this. Feuds between siblings are not restricted to the royal house, they're a tale you can find anywhere. The Fina you find so adorable might turn out a wild beast, you know."

Aileen expressionlessly led Fritz and the others out the room, leaving knights to keep watch.

(That child... did such a thing!)

Feeling she'd been betrayed, Aileen walked down the palace corridor. Taking along her knights she called out one order after the next.

"Gather all the main members at once. The white and black knights should be here to receive their medals. They both hold vital roles, make sure to call for them without fail."

Fritz watched as the knights moved on Aileen's orders. While he was supposed to be captain of the royal guard, his men were all moving on Aileen's orders.

"Aileen, what exactly is going on? When the Gaia Empire is invading, why is the palace so..."

She had raised what was almost an insurrection. No, it was insurrection.

Aileen smiled at Fritz.

"It's alright, Fritz-sama. I will definitely make fulfill your dreams."

Come so far, Fritz felt something terrifying in Aileen's smile. But having grown so involved, Fritz had lost the option to run away.



Having ventured to the capital to receive a medal, Rudel had come to the front of the dragoon training facilities.

It was a place he was stopping at for the first in a while, but the ones who

awaited him were knights prepared for battle. His brigade captain Oldart Billums and the vice-captain Alejandro Campbell.

The other dragoons were also preparing for battle, waiting for Rudel's arrival.

Rudel could see his colleague Luxheidt Aiguille making an apologetic gesture behind the dragoon brigade in full battle formation.

Bennet who had accompanied him there was also perplexed by the situation.

In the first place, Rudel had dropped by to train with Enora. But when he arrived, he found the dragoons preparing for war.

Of course, it confused him.

Failing to grasp anything, Rudel asked the captain.

"Captain, what's all this about? Do you need me to do anything?"

The self-proclaimed charmer in his prime Oldart made a belligerent smile as he spoke to Rudel.

"No, you see... we're just going to put some restraints on the damn fool who laid hands on the dragoon brigade's idol. We're just going to crush a newbie who's gotten on his high horse just because he's got a bit strong. This isn't a personal grudge or anything."

The vice-captain with a scar on his face, Alejandro spoke.

"... Leading beauties around, a guy who's even in a position to lay hands on my daughter. There's no way I could leave him be. We will be setting things straight here."

Thinking they were misunderstanding something, Rudel sent a glance at Luxheidt, who seemed to be the only one still sane.

"Sorry."

While Luxheidt apologized, he looked like he was enjoying it.

Having been looking forward to her training with Rudel, Enora was deeply irritated as she looked at the other brigade members getting in their way.

"Hey, isn't this a bit too terrible? Did you really need to assemble these numbers to take on Rudel? We're a bit busy here."

Feigning calmness, perhaps Bennet was a little scared as her tail curled up.

“T-that’s right. What’s more, using dragons for personal affairs is strictly prohibited. Captain, this is surely no good.”

Rudel surrounded by women.

And Rudel with women sticking up for him.

The will of the dragoon brigade became one.

Oldart.

“Don’t screw with me! Bennet-chan, you have to wake up! That man is a wolf!”

Hearing that, Bennet’s ears slumped down. Of all else, Bennet was a demi-human, a wolf, and he made it sound like...

“... I’m part of the wolf tribe.”

As she said that, Oldart started making excuses. “Men are all wolved beneath the belt,” he said as he broke into a sweat.

Meanwhile, Alejandro,

“You should get a bit of a better eye for me! It’s Rudel we’re talking about. That Rudel!”

Being called a that, Rudel made a dubious expression as he sent a glance over to Izumi, who kept silent all the way. Trying to keep out of it, Izumi seemed truly reluctant to receive that glance.

“Hey, am I really that terrible?”

Izumi.

“In a different sense, you’re considerably terrible. No, I think you’re a really good guy, normally.”

“I-I see!”

Seeing Rudel delighted at Izumi’s praise, Enora seemed displeased and Oldart let out a shout.

“You don’t have to sweat the small things! We’re right here, and so is Rudel!”

Then there's only one thing to do!"

"We'll show you hell!"

"Today is the day you die!"

"Bury the bastard!!"

Answering their dragoons' cries, the dragons also roared and soared into the skies. Straddling their dragons, the dragoons danced through the air.

Oldart spoke to Rudel.

"Rudel, we'll take you on. Get on up there."

As he said that, he soared into the sky, and the dragoons began flying around as if to draw a circle.

Seeing that, Rudel's eyes began to sparkle.

Enora,

"Those numbers are a bit much. That's more than twenty dragons. Rudel, just go home for today."

Bennet was also worried.

"This is a personal affair. There won't be a problem if you refuse."

She seemed worried for her subordinate Rudel.

Izumi looked over the worried two as she spoke with a resigned face.

"There's nothing you can do when he gets like that. Rudel, make sure you don't get hurt too badly. It will be bad if you get hospitalized before you get your medal."

Rudel smiled.

"Yeah, leave it to me... it's just when my enemy's so serious, wouldn't it be rude not to get serious myself?"

As he said that, Rudel smiled and whistled.

From a large hole near the facility, the white dragon Sakuya popped out her head and roared. The dragons soaring through the sky weakly roared back in answer.

Sakuya landed before Rudel and turned him her back.

A smiling Rudel boarded her in an instant. As he lifted into the air with Sakuya, Bennet sighed.

“You’re at a real disadvantage with those numbers. I’ll lend a hand. Heleene.”

As Bennet called her dragon, a blue beautiful dragon descended to the ground. In her mouth was a mass of meat she had procured from somewhere.

It seems she was in the middle of a meal.

After crushing that boned meat in her teeth and swallowing it down, she directed her back at Bennet.

Enora as well.

“I-I can also... Falk, get over here!”

Appearing in response to that voice was the wind dragon Falk. Spreading out his large wings, he roared and once Enora had gotten on his back, he took to the sky.

Seeing all that, Izumi breathed out a deep sigh.

“Hah, guess I should start running.”

She said as she fled from the spot.



In the sky, the dragoons flocked around the white dragon.

“Dammit! She won’t fall!”

“She’s way too hard!”

“Oy, someone go stall the other two!”

As a subspecies of gaia dragon, a species that faced difficulties in aerial combat, Sakuya flapped her four large, white wings.

Double the size of the gray dragons that made up a majority of the dragoons, she held a different level of intensity. As this expedition had failed to recruit any gaia or red dragons, they lacked any real means to get damage through.

And such a dragon was being guarded by Bennet and Enora’s dragons.

While Bennet could perform well on ground battles, in the air, she exhibited abilities lower than the average dragoon. Regardless, she was accompanied by a wild water dragon.

Enora's wind dragon made use of its speed in aerial combat to stand superior.

Against those three dragoons, Oldart's forces numbered over twenty.

But even with seven times the forces, they were unable to put a dent on Sakuya, who struggled in aerial combat.

"No, she's way too hard! It wasn't like this before!"

The one who answered Oldart's panicked voice was Bennet.

"I did my best to train her!"

Looking at Bennet answer full of confidence, Oldart,

"Bennet-chan really is cute~ but Rudel... I won't forgive you!"

Atop Sakuya's back, Rudel blocked the breath attacks coming in from around with his shields of light. And if a dragon got too close, it would be batted away by Sakuya's large arms.

(I planned to beat him down to show him there are still people better, but... so he grew this strong.)

Even as he raised this stupid ruckus, Oldart was amazed by Rudel's growth. He was convinced his own decision hadn't been mistaken.

(It wasn't a mistake to leave him with the strongest in land and air, Bennet-chan and Keith. God dammit, if only Keith was able to eat him up along the way. But eating up Bennet-chan, really cut me some slack.)

Before Rudel who normal dragoons were no longer a match for, Oldart showed a smile.

(Just how strong will he grow.)

Oldart and his dragon took a round around Sakuya as she kept stagnant, blowing away any dragon that got too close. Looking closely, there was also a wind dragon battle between parent and child going on.

"Enora, call it quits already!"



“You’re the one who should call it quits!”

The wind dragons were playing a game of chase.

Turning his eyes to Bennet, he saw she was keeping a moderate distance from three dragons, going on the defense to hold them in place.

(Hah, I wanted to be over there. But we can’t leave this one like this.)

Oldart looked at Rudel, issuing orders to his subordinates.

“Don’t get close, continue circling and sprinkling attacks! Let’s see just how long Rudel can hold out!”

There, with a smile of madness from Sakuya’s back, Rudel seemed delighted.

“That’s just what I wanted!”

He said such a thing.

(... Oh my, this guy’s scary.)

Thought Oldart.



It was a tower to shut away royalty.

Within that prison made by royalty was a luxurious cell for royalty.

The room had a fluffy bed, a carpet spread out. All the furniture was in order, and bookshelves were prepared as well.

But they didn’t contain books.

Fina looked over the room.

“Good grief, to shove me into a place like this.”

She said and breathed a sigh.

There were iron bars running across the window from which the light streamed in. It was impossible for Fina to leave through them.

Across the entrance door were two female knights on watch. Sitting on the sofa, Fina thought over what would happen now.

“... They’ll let me look after animals, won’t they? I should put in an order.”

In her life of boredom, she thought of what would give her warmth. Showing a surprising amount of leisure, it wasn't as if Fina never considered it would come to this.

“Wait a second... if they're going to lock me away like this, that means I don't have to work and I can spend all my time fluffing up fluffy animals, right? Oh me oh my! That might be amazing!”

The expressionless Fina stood, raising both her hands as she did a jump for joy.

“The first one should be a dog, perhaps? And then a cat...”

Just as her fantasies expanded, a knock came at the door.

Before she could answer, the door opened up.

Standing there was her elder sister Aileen.

Leading along her prided knights, she appeared before Fina with a smile.

(What's this, she's appeared without delay.)

Fina stopped her dance and curtsied to Aileen and Fritz.

“It has been a long while, sister.”

Aileen motioned her to sit. There were tables stationed with a sofa in-between, and after Aileen took a seat first, Fritz stood diagonally behind her, keeping wary of Fina.

If anything happened, he seemed ready to cut at her.

(Bringing along her favorite knight, looks like someone's having fun.)

While she wanted to complain, Fina endured and sat before her sister. There, Aileen offered an apology.

“This is all happening so fast we haven't found someone to look after you. I can't serve you any tea, I'm sorry Fina.”

Fina shook her head.

“Don't worry about that. And so? Can I ask why you've called me here, sister?”

Knowing Aileen would make a move, Fina knew this day would come. Of course, she intended it to be her sister shut in the royal tower instead of herself.

(Well, family feuds are only good sense for the royals and nobles. Perhaps I was a little too naïve. Thought my preparations have gone a considerable way.)

Aileen's face turned from a smile to serious as she explained the present situation.

"Fina, father has collapsed. Luckily, there is no danger to his life. But he is suffering difficulty speaking. To add to that, the Gaia Empire has made its move. Don't you think someone has to take charge in such a situation?"

Fina listened in expressionlessly.

But she closed her eyes.

(Ah~, I just pulled an all nightery, I'm sleepy. They didn't even let me sleep in the carriage. I want to drink some coffee. A straight shot should get me right up.)

She was thinking over something completely different, but Aileen knew Fina's expression wouldn't change and went on.

Perhaps she thought the girl was taking it meekly.

"If we show weakness in such a crisis, the archdukes will take advantage of us. So I have decided to take command. But even if I can suppress the palace, I can't do anything about the knight brigades or the army. So I'm going to have Fritz-sama do his best."

Aileen's gaze turned to Fritz. Fritz stuck out his chest as he came out before her.

Fina...

(Oy, oy, you really sure about that? He doesn't have any experience leading a large force, does he? Rather, he doesn't have any achievements for anyone to recognize him by.)

Fina opened her mouth.

“... What happened to mother. Also, starting with the three archduke houses, a large number of nobles won't be satisfied with Fritz.”

Aileen narrowed her eyes, she took on quite a displeased expression.

“For now, I cannot be bothered to care for such a trifle. What's more, we have many who will cooperate with us. Fina, the current Courtois is mistaken. The nobles only ever think of themselves, ignoring the people...”

Fina thought the same. But all she agreed with was the part about Courtois being mistaken.

Right, themselves included.

(We rely too much on the dragoons. An environment of abundant land watched over by powerful dragoons... the surrounding countries have polished various things to go up against us, yet we do nothing at all. We have no prince to succeed, Courtois is filled with problems... it really is a hassle.)

Aileen informed Fina of just how disappointing Courtois' nobles were, and of the pain they caused their people.

And using this as an opportunity, Aileen...

“With a commoner like Fritz' achievements as an opportunity, Courtois will undergo a large change. It will no longer be people for the country, but a country for the people. We will need to make this a country where everyone's equal, where as long as you're skilled, you'll be recognized.”

If Fina could make any expression, she would be laughing. What's more, with a belittling smile on her face.

But the words that came out of her mouth...

“You're right. That is important. I do think to evaluate talented personnel and assign them important roles is important. It's just, I cannot quite agree with Fritz-dono being the representative of that. He does not have any achievements.”

Aileen remained displeased.

“... He need only start building them up now.”

She said.

“Big sister, there are no absolutes in war. Fritz-dono.”

Fina directed her eyes at Fritz. He seemed a little surprised, but he instantly replied.

“What is it?”

“The war this time around... do you think we can win it?”

Fritz stuck out his chest as he clearly declared.

“We will win. Using this chance Aileen has given me to prove even a commoner can rise in the country of Courtois is something of a duty to me.”

“Is that so,” Fina said and looked down a bit.

Aileen to Fina,

“Fina, you’ll cooperate with me, won’t you? In the academy, you interacted not only with nobles but with commoners as well. Can you understand how I feel?”

As she sought out Fina’s approval, Aileen seemed to be trying to increase her allies.

What Aileen spoke of was correct. Fina also wanted to make the system more meritocratic than it currently stood.

It wasn’t as if she didn’t see the need to reform Courtois that relied on the dragoons so much it ruined itself.

But this wasn’t the time.

It hadn’t come to that stage.

That was Fina’s conclusion.

Fina expressionlessly looked at her sister Aileen head on as she spoke.

“I’ll have to decline, sister (A country for the people, eh. That’s wrong, sister).”

Seeing Aileen’s expression of disbelief, Fina thought.

(It’s not people for the country or a country for the people. It takes both sides

for a country to live on. As I thought, the two of us are incompatible.)

Fina decided to give Aileen her farewell.



Rudel brought his feet to the palace.

It was to receive his war medals.

In the past, he had saved a town attacked by monsters. The ruckus about Celestia's ancient weapon was finally dying down, and the Kingdom of Celestia sent over some choice words of gratitude.

Receiving them, Rudel and Aleist would receive some medals as well.

Rudel was rarely ever at the palace, Rudel was unable to settle as he looked around.

His accompanying inspector Izumi posed him the question.

"What's wrong? It's rare to see you so restless."

The surroundings were the same, but Rudel felt a sort of tingling sensation on his skin.

"No, that's not it. It's just, this sort of..."

In the middle of their conversation, Rudel spotted Aleist in the hall and called out to him. Leading along his subordinates, for some reason Aleist was holding cleaning supplies.

"Ah, good morning."

Izumi made a dubious face.

"It's been a while since I last saw you like that. Rather, aren't you supposed to be receiving some medals today, Aleist?"

Aleist nodded.

"That's right. That's why I have to finish up my job before that. After this, I just have to return to the room and get ready."

Leaving the palace's cleaning to the heir of a Count House was quite the peculiar tale.

What's more, Aleist was the black knight.

Rudel spoke up.

"Aleist, the palace feels strange, but did something happen? Does it always feel like this?"

To Rudel's question, Aleist.

"No, I did hear a rumor his majesty collapsed. But there are lots of other strange rumors, and I can't tell you what exactly happened."

As Aleist seemed troubled, "I see," Rudel said as he decided to make for the waiting room.

"I'll go on ahead. You're coming later, right?"

As he said that, Aleist nodded with a smile.

"That's right. But I just can't get used to walking around the palace not in these work clothes."

Seeing Aleist's laugh, is that really alright? Thought Rudel, but he kept silent.

The man in question seemed to enjoy his job, and he got the feeling that wasn't something for an outsider to stick his mouth into.

"I'll be waiting."

As Rudel said that and led Izumi off, Aleist waved his hand.

"Yeah, I'll be there before you know it."

He replied.

As they separated from Aleist's group, Izumi began to chuckle.

Rudel seemed puzzled.

"Something funny happen?"

As he asked, Izumi shook her head with a smile.

"No, I was just thinking you and Aleist really have become friends. I just thought it was strange."

"You think?"

“I do.”

Being told that by Izumi, Rudel felt a bit awkward as he scratched his face with his fingertip.

At the same time, the atmosphere of the palace still bothered him for some reason.

(I have a bad feeling about this. I hope it goes without issue.)



## Chapter 148: And Aleist the Protagonist

The Gaia Empire and the Kingdom of Courtois.

Near the border, a large formation of troops had gathered.

The soldiers sent creeped-out glances at the monsters stationed nearby, on standby as ordered. The most conspicuous monster, the Gora included, they all had white insignia-like lines racing over their black bodies, making them particularly conspicuous.

The black monsters wore their white symbols uniformly.

“Oy, these things better be safe”

“Like I know. All I can tell you is ‘t they’re part of the third prince’s army.”

“But a look at that, and I know Courtois’ is done for this time.”

A great many knights and soldiers were watching the wyverns flying through the sky. They were great in numbers and would obediently listen to the knights riding them.

Seeing that wyvern brigade soar gallantly through the sky, and those knights and soldiers were enveloped with a sense of elation; they would finally be able to win against the Kingdom of Courtois—nay, the dragoons who had tormented them for hundreds of years.

Their supreme commander-the first prince-walked beside Askewell, the third.

More middle-aged than a young man, the first prince looked over the army of monsters.

“Askewell, this is the real test of your army. But are you alright with this? Using monsters to massacre them... not everyone in our lands has the best look on their faces.”

Rather than worried for his younger brother, his tone was one putting a check on him. In actuality, if this war succeeded, then Askewell would be the closest to the seat of emperor.

Askewell noticed they were words wary of a younger brother who was

earning a name as the empire's hero.

"Someone has to do it. The empire is already at its limit. Even if my name alone is to fall to the dirt, if that will save tens of thousands of imperial lives, it is a cheap price to pay."

To Askewell's declaration,

"I see,"

Was all the first prince curtly replied. But continuing on.

"... This time, my army will serve as bait to draw out the dragoons. But are you alright with leaving us so many of your trump card wyvern units?"

Two armies were preparing to assault separate stretches of the border. The division centered around humans was about to make for the border to attract Courtois' main force.

"We have the Gora. What's more, some wyverns of our own. It will be troublesome for me if you don't return alive, big brother."

An army of monsters surpassing ten thousand.

As he took the lead, Askewell was certain of his victory. No, he was certain victory was the only path to survival.

(Eventually, the empire will wear down and face internal divide. Before that happens, we must obtain as much of Courtois' plentiful soil as we're capable of.)

The imperial palace was in shambles, and family quarrels ran rampant between his brothers and sisters.

Rather than those ever ending, Askewell's eyes captured a future of the empire's division if the central power fell any lower.

The first prince.

"I see. Askewell."

"Something more?"

Askewell looked at his brother, but the first prince was already on his way off. Showing his back, a few short words.

“Come back alive. I’ll crack open a treasured wine.”

Hearing that, Askewell immediately grew wary of assassination, but that didn’t seem to be the mood. The timing was far too unseemly for his death.

“Yes, if you’ll put up with me, I’ll happily share a glass.”

With those words, the two returned to the armies they commanded.



The royal palace.

An individual came for Rudel.

He was a knight of the royal guard, who read aloud the official papers he carried on his person. Rudel heard them out in the waiting room before the ceremony.

Izumi stood to her feet, her eyes wide as she opened her mouth.

“You want Rudel to head to the site alone? Are you mocking us!?”

The royal guard looked at the high knight Izumi and scoffed.

“This is an official order. What mockery is there to be found?”

If it was an order from his majesty, Rudel had no right to refuse. Even if he hailed from an archduke house, he was now working as a single knight of the kingdom.

On the royal decree—

“Izumi, stand down. If I’m told to investigate Gaia movement on the border, I have no right to refuse. I have received my orders. I shall now head to the site. But if there really is movement, I do think the road will be perilous with myself alone.”

— Rudel was told to take the mission on his own. Normally, this would be an impossible situation.

“Rudel, this is crazy! We’re in the palace at this very moment. Why would you be receiving a written decree!? Why does the king not come order you directly!? And you’re a part of the Dragoon brigade. If you were told by the captain, I could understand, but why are you as an individual...”

After confirming the order had been passed on, the royal guard knight immediately left the room. Left on their own, Rudel and Izumi exchanged a glance.

But Rudel was smiling.

“They’re sending me to the site alone... should I interpret that they expect great things of me?”

Izumi sent a sharp glare to his joke.

“Rudel, inform the others at once. This is wrong. There’s something strange about this decree!”

The papers they accepted were definitely signed by his majesty and stamped with his seal. But Izumi continued explaining to him it was impossible.

Rudel was already well aware.

“If the enemy is moving, it’s a part of my job. And you see, I need to head there, even if I’m alone. At the fortress on that stretch of the border... is Chlust. And if they really did move, then I’m sure the captain will soon follow my lead.”

As Rudel was about to leave the room, Izumi grabbed his arm. With a resolved expression—

“I’m going too. It’s too dangerous alone.”

Rudel sent her a smile and pleaded.

“No, the order specifies I go alone, see. And I have to depart at once. I need you to relay this matter to someone. It can be Luecke or Eunius. Is Aleist somewhere around? I’ll take the vanguard and stall the enemy for them.”

Rudel removed Izumi’s hand from his own, and made straight out of the room.

“I’ll catch up with you soon. Don’t do anything crazy.”

To a serious Izumi, Rudel smiled and waved her hand.

“Well, it’s possible they haven’t begun moving for real yet.”

Though he didn’t truly think so.

(I see... it's finally come. That was sooner than I thought.)

Recalling everything to that point, he did think it would happen someday. He couldn't understand it herself, but he got the feeling he had seen it coming.

The three black beasts who got in their way, yet lent a hand at the end—the boar, the bird, and the black fog had told him.

(They knew this day would someday come.)

After leaving the room and closing the door, Rudel thought.

(Fate, huh... now that's interesting.)

He hadn't a clue who had set it up. But he thought he had to go there, and those thoughts hastened his feet down the corridor.

His brother Chlust was stationed where a battlefield was expected.

"Just you wait, Chlust."



The surrounding civilians had evacuated to a fort overseeing the border. A messenger had already been sent to a town further into the country, sending out orders for others to evacuate.

A boy resembling Rudel took charge of the station.

"How's the evacuation efforts!?"

Wearing heavy armor, his subordinate confirmed the fort's situation before answering.

"It ain't looking good, captain. Those knights from central made off with the horses. Said they would spread the word and fled! If it were just the men, maybe, but with dames, kids, and old folk to look after, we're not going to make it."

The name of the knight called captain was Chlust Arses—Rudel's younger brother, and a knight forced to graduate from the academy.

Reconciling with his brother Rudel, he had a change of heart and fulfilled his duty as a knight of the fort.

But his superior knights fled before the enemy, and at this point, he was going to be forced to stand in as the one in charge.

Chlust looked out the fort.

A black smoke rising in the distance. The black, writhing army of the empire. A flock of monsters.

Looking at the situation before his eyes, he understood why someone would want to run away. But he could hardly bring that to mouth.

“We’ve already sent messengers around. Hold out until the dragoons arrive, then it’s our win!”

The civilians who’d fled into the fort were also consoled by the fact Courtois’ strongest dragoons would come. For better or worse, the ones who had always kept the Gaia Empire at bay were the dragoons.

Those that fled believed they would surely be saved another time. It was precisely because of that belief, that many refused to flee any further than the fort.

(This is bad. They plan to stay here and return home as soon as the war is over. To think our people are the ones who aren’t running...)

The dragoons’ existence granted peace of mind to the people. By that, while they had their anxieties, they were quite calm at the fort.

Whatever their mindset, that would mean Chlust would have to intercept the empire while shouldering a people who wouldn’t proactively flee.

Chlust had sought support from his little sister Erselica. He thought of what he could do and prepared for the time something happened.

Yet he had no way to foresee this great army before his eyes.

(Hold out until the dragoons come? But why have they amassed such an army at this point... they should be well aware they’ll just fall prey to the dragoons.)

All through history, the Empire had suffered great casualties by the dragoons. Chlust worried the empire might be holding some sort of trump card.

To blow away his anxieties, Chlust smacked his hands against his cheeks.

(It'll be fine. We can at least buy some time.)



In the royal palace of the Kingdom of Courtois, Aileen's preparations were underway. The surrounding attendants dressed her in a dress, a report was read to her as she changed.

"I see. So Rudel headed for the battlefield. Well, that one's the White Knight. There's no mistake he contributes to Courtois' war potential. If he loses, Fritz-sama's military exploits will stand out, so he has my thanks in that regard."

A female knight of the royal guard continued on with the report.

"The empire is invading Courtois with two separate armies as planned. It does seem the site Rudel made for is their main force, and they have a considerable number together."

Aileen spoke somewhat fed-up.

"An army of monsters of all things... the empire sure are savages. What about the preparations for the ceremony?"

The female knight informed her that one wasn't going too well. As Aileen's expression clouded, the knight immediately gave a follow-up.

"There is strong opposition to stationing him as supreme commander. Additionally, if you make him supreme commander, Fritz-dono will not have any opportunities to raise any personal military achievements. It is my humble opinion he should be placed in a position that affords him a little more freedom of movement. Perhaps second in command."

Aileen had a hard time accepting it, but there wouldn't be a problem as long as Fritz could perform, so she reluctantly agreed.

"I'll let your side take care of it. But then who will we appoint as commander?"

Courtois' palace was in a hot haste. Where Aileen couldn't see, the female knight curved the ends of her lips.

(Like hell a commoner knight can fulfill such a role. A decoration should act as a decoration should... it is out of the question for royal blood to mix with

common mud. The knights will much sooner accept the Black Knight, the same station as our country's founder.)

The nobles and knights hoisting up Aileen simply wanted themselves as the next major power.

There was a problem with Fina, whose expression never changed. The easy-to-manipulate Aileen was more fitting of a portable shrine.

They had followed her for no reason other than Courtois' internal factional strife. Whether war came and land was taken away, as long as they had the dragoons, they knew they could take it back at any time.

That was simply how large of an existence the dragoons were.

"I recommend Aleist Hardie. The conspicuous Black Knight should do well for supreme commander. His parents have already arrived at a manor in the capital. I'm sure they came to see their son in his finest clothing, but they should suffice to hold against him."

Aileen was a tad displeased with her dress.

"Wait. This color won't pair well with Fritz... change it at once."

The female knight looked at Aileen and thought.

(You are a wonderful queen, Aileen-sama. With this, one corner of the three lords will fall, a great many nobles will lose their standing... rarely has such change befallen Courtois, and you are the perfect statue to rally behind. As long as an heir is born, love a commoner all you want. Not that you'll be leaving this castle.)

As Aileen changed her dress, she suddenly recalled.

"Come to think of it, what are we going to do about the sword we prepared for Fritz-sama? It was prepared as a sword for the supreme commander."

The knight smiled.

"You need only hand it to the supreme commander. It's a sword made with the finest craft in Courtois, it should hold up perfectly fine if you lend it out for a short while. It's good for show, and using the weapon one's accustomed to is best on the battlefield. Fritz-dono wouldn't care to test the limits of a borrowed



blade, he won't be able to fight to the best of his abilities."

Aileen tilted her head, but she didn't have any particularly deep thoughts when it came to swords. She took the knight's opinion as-is.

"Then I leave it to you. Please let Fritz-sama play an active role."

The female knight gave a knight's salute.

"Leave it to me."



It was just a vague feeling, yet he thought this day would come—

Rudel produced his belongings from a bag on Sakuya's back. There were blue ornaments decorating his white armor. He took out his shield and confirmed its state.

Near the dragoon's dragon stables, Sakuya was eating a meal. She was heartily munching down on a large quantity of meat, filling up for a battlefield ahead.

Watching the feed empty at an alarming rate, the dragon stable workers prepared a successive stream of seconds.

"Keep piling it on!"

"Let the other dragons eat too! I don't care if you have to empty the storehouse!"

"Hurry and check the refill valve!"

Once Rudel informed them of the Gaia Empire's large-scale movements the dragoon facilities were as boisterous as a hive of bees. A dragoon immediately headed to the palace to confirm the information, while the dragons were put to eating as preparations began.

In the midst of that, Rudel equipped his own armor. Once a crude, functional piece, it was the gift the black fiendish-looking boar granted him at the end. As he put the armor on, Rudel repeated an action of opening and clenching his hand.

When he looked up, the sky was cloudy. The weather looked like it might turn to rain, but that alone wouldn't delay the attack.

After Rudel pulled down his helmet, he grabbed someone nearby busily moving around.

“My preparations are complete. I’m going to depart.”

The dragon stable work spoke in a loud voice.

“Understood. Um, this is your first campaign, right? Make sure you’re back in one piece!”

Rudel strongly gripped the hand held out for a handshake. The stablehand smiled.

“To think I was the one who prepared the white knight for his first campaign; I want to brag, so go and do something big.”

After returning a smile, Rudel flew off towards Sakuya’s back.

(This isn’t my first campaign... no, that part doesn’t matter.)

When he landed, Sakuya had just finished eating, as she spread out her four wings wide with a roar. From inside the dragon stables, he heard dragon roars in reply.

Rudel stroked Sakuya’s back.

“Are you ready?”

‘My tummy is full so I’m fine! Sakuya will drive them back!’

When Sakuya hoisted up her two large arms and showed her motivation, Rudel pat her twice lightly. With that as the signal, she slowly moved her wings and rose into the sky.

The surrounding people took shelter. Even so, once they had risen to a safe height, Rudel spoke to Sakuya.

“Sakuya, I get the feeling this will be an important battle for both me and you. So I’ll say it now. Thank you for becoming my dragon.”

Sakuya tilted her head. She didn’t seem to really understand what he meant.

‘I don’t get it, but Sakuya is Rudel’s dragon, you hear! I’ll do my best! Sakuya is strong, she’ll take the enemy down in no time!’

Rudel laughed.

“I’m counting on it. Now let’s be off... \_\_\_\_ awaits.”

Rudel looked beyond the sky, sensing something fuzzy.

Sakuya violently moved her wings, as she gradually built up speed, a wall of magic formed around her. The wind was being blocked by the wall. As Sakuya headed right off for the battlefield, the people working at the stables waved their hands.



Around the time Rudel headed for the site.

His preparations for the ceremony at the palace complete, Aleist was met by his parents.

“Father, mother! W-why!”

Disregarding his confusion, his parents approached and tapped him on the shoulders. They seemed exceptionally pleased, causing him to act bashful.

Aleist’s father spoke.

“We came to see you in your hour of triumph. An invite came right from the palace.”

Aleist’s mother was moved to tears.

“You’ve grown into a young fine man. You were really worrying us, you haven’t come home at all lately. Are you eating right? Haven’t you lost some weight?”

Aleist gave a bitter smile. He took a bit of distance so the two could calm down.

“I-I’m fine. More importantly, I’m just receiving a medal this time, and I’m something of an extra. The real star this time is Rudel.”

When he said that, his father gave him a blank look. Aleist wondered if he had said something wrong. His mother doubtfully opened her mouth.

“Aleist, the Gaia Empire is invading, so you were appointed supreme commander of the subjugation force, weren’t you? The dragoons will drive

them off, so I'm sure it'll be fine, but it's an unprecedented large appointment at your age."

Aleist took on a pose of surprise. At his curious posture, his father fell into confusion.

"The palace is already in a panic. The knights are preparing, and it's already been decided you'd be appointed supreme commander. Don't tell me you never heard."

"B-but! I didn't hear anything in the morning cleaning! And there was nothing at all yesterday!"

Now something completely different surprised his father.

"C-cleaning? What do you mean!? Weren't you a commanding officer of the defenders? What do you mean you were cleaning in the morning? I never heard about that!"

Grabbed by the shoulders and shook, Aleist was too disheveled for a proper reply.

"Huh? War? The Gaia Empire!? Seriously, what!? Rather, I'm just on the defender cleaning duty and..."

His mother cried out.

"C-cleaning duty!? My Aleist is!? How could my cute Aleist be...! ...Aah."

"Dear!"

His father embraced up his mother on the verge of collapse. Aleist verified the two were still getting along as well as ever, but more than that...

(A war at this timing... more importantly, is this an event? No, wrong. This isn't a game. It's not a game anymore!)

Thoughts of games and events still crossed his mind, but Aleist cut off that train of thought by telling himself this was a different world.

(That's right. I became friends with Rudel. Eunius and Luecke too... this is the world I live in!)

Just as he was about to rush out of the room, Izumi raced in. She was out of

breath, her hair was a mess.

“Aleist! Rudel was... dispatched on his own.”

Aleist opened his eyes wide, his mouth hung down in mute amazement. That was practically the same development as the game. Strangely, in the game, informing the protagonist of the enemy country's invasion was Izumi's role.

Aleist felt something truly ominous at this turn of events.

(At this rate, Rudel will...)

Izumi grabbed Aleist's arm. She made a petition.

“There was definitely a royal decree. But something's wrong. Rudel was ordered to sortie alone... and something's strange about the palace. It's uncannily calm. I'm begging you, save Rudel.”

Holding his swooning mother, his father stuck his glare on Izumi.

“And just who are you? Aleist has the heavy responsibility of supreme commander in the war against the Gaia Empire. If you're seeking help, can't you ask someone more suitable!? Aleist, I'll hear the explanation later. We're out of time.”

Aleist tried to open his mouth. Right after, the royal guard flooded into the room. And the royal guard knights apprehended Izumi.

The one leading them was Fritz.

“It will be quite troublesome if you run amok. Black Knight Aleist, the appointment ceremony will begin shortly. You may escort your parents to the hall. And throw the high knight in the dungeon.”

After taking the orders, Fritz was gone. When Aleist tried to resist, the royal guard had surrounded his parents. Where his parents couldn't see, there were even some whose hands had reached the hilts of their swords.

“You lot... why are you...”

The royal guard simply grinned, they took Aleist in and led him out of the room.



Alongside his tag-along knights, Eunius headed for the hall to participate in the medal awarding ceremony.

He sensed a strange disturbance in his chest, and a panic in the palace, but shoved into a waiting room and put under surveillance, he was unable to move.

While he could understand something was happening, he couldn't understand what it was. From the other end of the corridor walked Luecke.

When Eunius raised a hand, Luecke looked around and sighed. He approached Eunius to complain.

"Don't speak with me so lightly here. More importantly, there's something I've got to ask you. I was just half shoved into my room, but what in the blazes is going on? If someone's capable of doing that to us, who could they be?"

Luecke had a similarly bad premonition. His tone gave the impression he already knew who he was dealing with. Eunius mouthed the name of the person who instinctually came to mind.

"If we're dealing with the royal guard, it's got to be Princess Aileen. But this is some terrible treatment. I've got to get in at least a complaint."

Seeing Eunius' ferocious smile, Luecke looked like he wanted to say something, but after breathing a resigned sigh, he walked off towards the hall. While the two walked down the palace hallway, their surroundings were in a flurry. Luecke gave a slight smile.

"Perhaps something's happened to Rudel and Aleist as well. Shall we invite them for a protest?"

Eunius smiled mischievously.

"A protest? Now aren't you proper. We've got to send a message. That's right, let's get Rudel to circle the palace with his dragon. I'm sure they'll be shocked."

Fed-up as he was, Luecke seemed to be having fun.

"But that way, only Rudel will be punished. Let's see, I guess I'll try thinking up some interesting revenge. Not like the ceremony's going to be interesting anyway."

Eunius looked at Luecke with a mildly surprised face. But different from the last, he gave a truly mischievous grin.

“You really are better as you are now. If we were fighting, it’d be much more fun with the current you.”

Luecke shrugged.

“Still fighting? You’re one who never changes. But... right. I didn’t participate in our final school year. Thinking back on it now, I do regret it just a bit.”

Eunius raised his voice.

“That’s why I told you. Get in the ring, I said! That would’ve been a blast.”

The smiling two approached the hall. But what awaited them there was—



In the waiting room of the audience chamber that would host the ceremony, Aleist couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

While his parents were still there, Aileen made her appearance and told him on the spot to become supreme commander. And Aleist confirmed it with Aileen.

Where was Rudel?

It was the worst possible possibility. Aleist was a reincarnater. Holding knowledge of a game, he knew what would happen if war broke out with the Gaia Empire. The irredeemable villain Rudel runs off to sell out his country, leaving chaos in his wake.

And Rudel is taken out by a prince of the empire. But the Rudel of this world was idiotically positive.

Aleist wanted to think the future had changed somewhere down the line; yet, come so far, as if to snark at him, the world was throwing bits and pieces together to reform the event.

“Rudel was dispatched to the site where it’s said the Gaia Empire might invade. We have determined that one to be a diversion. Therefore, we sent only one unit. There’s a fort there, I’m sure they’ll be able to hold it. He is one of

Courtois' strongest, a dragoon, after all."

Hearing the location, Aleist's expression turned even worse. That was the site of the game's decisive battle. No matter how he considered it, he felt the enemy's real force was there.

"Only one unit? That's... at the very least, send backup!"

Aleist's parents were surrounded by the royal guard. His mother anxious, his father glaring at the knights.

"Princess Aileen, what is the meaning of this!? Such discourtesy, even if you are a royal princess, don't think this will be forgiven!"

Aileen ignored Aleist's father's opinion and turned to Aleist.

"Aleist-dono, you are the supreme commander. You will be granted a sword prepared by the Kingdom of Courtois. For you to carry out your role splendidly. Well, you just have to be there. Please don't do a thing."

"Not a thing?"

Aileen nodded.

"Yes, you are an ornament going by the name of supreme commander. We seek nothing more from you."

Both Aleist and his father glared at Aileen. The surrounding knights directed their weapons at the two.

Aleist firmly contained himself.

"Then I will head out as Rudel's reinforcements. That site is the critical one. If you want an ornament, it doesn't have to be..."

Aileen seemed troubled. Yes, it was all so troublesome.

"It has already been decided. Or will you throw away any and everything to go to his aid? Very well. I have no interest in you. Of course, at that time, know you will lose everything. The Hardie House will be done for."

Once Aileen had left, Aleist's tears broke out. They fell as he collapsed at the knees. He wanted to save his friend. He wanted to go and help Rudel.

He had a bad feeling.



But thinking of his parents, he couldn't move. They had raised him with love, an impertinent reincarnator like himself, they were his second family. Aleist didn't know what he was supposed to do.

And into that space, that waiting room, the royal guard shoved in Aleist's subordinates. His academy juniors, Seli and Juju had come to join in on Aleist's ceremony.

The blue haired Nate was also shoved in, mumbling complaints to herself.

If he ran, then those gathered here—

Aleist had a bad feeling about this. And he was mortified at himself, so unable to move. His parents and harem members nervously watched him as he wept.

It was at that moment. Aleist's mother opened her mouth.

"Aleist, raise your face."

"M-mother?"

And with a smile, she spoke to Aleist.

"You want to go save your friend, don't you?"

Aleist's nodded. His tears spilling all over the place, he opened his mouth.

"He's helped me out again, and again, and again. If he hadn't been there, I'd never be where I am now... I was never able to properly say thank you. And yet, I can't even save him!"

He thought he had become strong. He used his game knowledge to raise his level. But wrapped up in a large flow that wouldn't resolve, Aleist couldn't move.

His mother placed a hand on his shoulder.

"... Now move how you want to."

"What are you..."

Aleist's mother spoke to him with a smile. Hearing that, his father seemed bewildered. To his father, in a tone different from usual.

"What is that? Does the Head of the Hardie House fold to such a paltry

threat!? All of you, good god, the Hardie House shall support Aleist's actions. We are prepared to take an aggressive stance against the Kingdom of Courtois. If you understand that, you'd best stop chasing after Aleist... you'll never find happiness."

At the end, his mother showed kindness towards his girlfriends. Aleist looked at his mother's face.

"W-why. I mean, if I run from here..."

"He's a precious friend, isn't he? Aleist, as long as I can remember, you always had a screw loose somewhere, always chasing around women, you had me worried. When you went off to the academy, there were days I lost sleep over the thought you might have gotten some girl pregnant. But I think it was around the end of your second year? You were talking so happily about your friend, the happiest I'd ever seen you. The Aleist who always seemed to be looking for god knows what was actually having fun..."

When he thought of how his mother was properly looking at him, Aleist cast down his eyes. Ever since he reincarnated, he had always looked at his world thinking it was a game, not truly looking at anything at all. He spoke to people practically as if watching characters on a screen.

His mother had noticed.

"Aleist, go. To do such a thing, Courtois must be in a precarious position. Even if you obey her here, Princess Aileen will surely continue to issue the Hardie House unreasonable demands."

His father gave a strong nod.

"That's right! His majesty is absent, the queen is nowhere to be seen! This is plain suspicious, is it not! Our Hardie House may be upstarts, but there is no reason for us to be treated like this! Don't worry about us. Aleist, just do what you want to. There's no way such tyranny shall be allowed!"

Aleist wiped his tears, he stood and looked at his parents' faces. And embracing them, he cast his words.

"... Thank you. For loving someone as shoddy as me, thank you. I don't mind if you disinherit me. I'm going to save my friend of my own will. Thank you for

everything.”

He didn’t think an excuse like that would work. But he was definitely going to use his connections to aid his parents to the best of his abilities. Luckily, Aleist was friends with the sons of the three lords.

(I’d rather not use them like this, but...)

Aleist turned to look at his girlfriends. The girls who gathered once he lost interest in a harem. To be completely honest, he didn’t know whether or not he loved them.

But they were people he couldn’t hate. And traveling with these girls was fun.

“... I’m sorry. I am no longer the heir to a Count House, nor am I a knight of Courtois. As but a single human, I’m going to save a friend. I’m sure I’ve caused you some trouble, but this is where we part ways. Thank you... and goodbye.”

After incapacitating the royal guard knights on watch with his bare hands, Aleist leapt out of the room. He told everyone not to linger as he raced his way of the palace.

He got the feeling he had lost many things. But at the same time, he couldn’t overlook the plight of his dear friend who had opened his eyes.

(I’m sure I’ll never be anyone important. I’m not a hero. I’m stupid and servile... even so, it can just be for once. Can’t I stand up just once for the sake of a friend!? If I run away here, I’ll never forgive myself for the rest of my life.)

To save a friend—save Rudel, Aleist rushed down the corridor.

## Chapter 149: The Empire's Advance

"So you were brought here too."

The jail cell the royal guard led Izumi to was already occupied by Sophina. A clammy underground dungeon, she could barely make out her face by the unreliable light.

"U-umm,"

Izumi was a high knight, same as Sophina. But Sophina was her senior and the second princess Fina's guard who headed a unit of her own. Why was she here? As Izumi puzzled over it, Sophina lifted herself off the bed and stretched.

"The princess was taken in too. We were bound and shoved in here. Our weapons were taken, but our clothes were left as is. They must be in quite a hurry."

Perhaps there was no time to dress them in prison robes, as after taking their weapons and shoving them in the cell, the royal guard knights had already gone off somewhere.

The soldier keeping watch over them seemed restless as well.

"Just what could have... this is just too terrible."

Sophina fully agreed with Izumi's words. While she agreed, she was keeping somewhat collected.

"There's been movement in the palace for quite a while now. It's just, I never imagined they would take it this far."

"You know something? I need to get out of here fast and save Rudel."

"... Err, did something happen to Rudel-dono?"

Sophina seemed troubled. Izumi promptly explained he had been sent off to the battlefield as a lone rider. When she described Aleist's predicament, Sophina seemed surprised.

"So the black knight's the supreme commander. Not bad. I thought she'd force Fritz into the position, but... did someone stop her? She's surprisingly

brittle.”

“You sure are calm.”

At Izumi’s light sarcasm, Sophina gave a sardonic laugh. After checking her surroundings, she whispered.

“Hey, don’t be like that. I managed to learn this and that was going on thanks to the princess. Sorry, but my lord was taken in too... until the major players at the palace make their move, I doubt she will make hers. That’s the sort of person she is.”

“Then she has something planned? If she doesn’t hurry up with it, something terrible will—”

“It’s already plenty terrible. But see, she intends to use these developments as well. She really is... if she was just a bit more decent of a human being, you can’t imagine how easier my life would be.”

After saying that, Sophina instructed Izumi to lie down and get some rest.



The audience chamber.

The gathered nobles were informed not of medals to be bestowed.

The kingdom of Courtois’ audience chamber was a vast room, it’s make of an extravagance worthy of a major power. The knights and nobles gathered in such a place, Eunius and Luecke included, were mostly struck dumbfounded.

The king wasn’t taking part.

The queen nowhere to be seen.

Princess Aileen stood in front of the throne, giving an address.

“The Gaia Empire has yet to learn their lesson, they are once again preparing to invade Courtois soil! Their parch has already begun... the time has come to show your loyalty to Courtois!”

Within all the confusion, upon hearing of the Gaia Empire’s march, the nobles were quick to direct their eyes to the dragoons taking part.

While they feigned composure, the dragoon brigade members looked to be

holding it in.

“We will prepare to depart at once. But first... we initially intended to request the role of supreme commander in this battle to the Black Knight. However, the black knight has fled like the coward he is. While he might not be a fitting replacement, I appoint the Captain of the Royal Guard, Fritz-dono as Supreme Commander.”

The audience chamber fell into chaos. It wasn't because the Gaia Empire had invaded. They had invaded too many times to count, and just as many times, the dragoons had repelled them.

The nobles' interests were drawn to the commoner Fritz appointed as supreme commander of the armed forces. Without any decent deeds of arms, and still young; the voices of dissatisfaction rose against him.

But Eunius didn't let it elude him.

“There are some around who aren't surprised.”

From nearby, Luecke nodded.

“Aleist isn't here, but I don't see Rudel either. That woman did something. To think she'd go this far.”

Neither Aleist nor Rudel were anywhere to be seen.

A confused gathering of knights and nobles. But among them were some not confused in the slightest, the royal guard, for one.

Eunius didn't seem amused.

“I doubt they're dead, but... I'm returning to my territory. I'll be sending soldiers from my place.”

Luecke glanced at Aileen, giving her address before the throne.

“What a coincidence. Once this farce is over, I'll be right on my way back—”

And Fritz walked out before Aileen. As he walked out in front of her, he was gifted the sword, the proof of his station by Aileen's hand.

Eunius looked at that sword.

“Haven't I seen that sword somewhere before—”

Aileen, after handing the sword to Fritz.

“This is a sword produced by gathering the best technology Courtois has to offer. Surely it’s worthy of the supreme commander. You have to make sure you bring it back.”

Fritz held the sword high.

“Without fail, I shall return here and report on our victory!”

Luecke, to Eunius’ comment.

“Looks like it’s only just been made. You must be seeing things. Forget that, she hasn’t said a word about Rudel.”

Luecke worried for his friend.



Aleist had come to the basement dungeon.

Showing himself from within the shadows of the dim cells, he restlessly checked his surroundings.

“Izumi-san, are you alright?”

Izumi sprung off the bed, looking at Aleist who had somehow entered her cell in surprise.

“I never knew you could do that.”

“Well you see, as I was chased around by night visits, I learned a thing or two on how to use it. Being the Black Knight sure is convenient... wait, no time to chit-chat. Here.”

Aleist pulled out Izumi’s katana from the shadow and handed it over. He tossed over the key alongside it.

“I’m in your debt. Aleist, what’s the situation right now?”

After accepting the katana and gripping the key tight, she tried to confirm the present situation from Aleist. But he hung his head.

“Sorry. I’ve just been running around. I want to inform Eunius and Luecke of the situation, but it’s not just the royal guard, it seems Princess Aileen’s got

some allies in other places... It's hopeless for me, I just stand out too much. I've come for your cooperation..."

Sophina in the cell lifted her body and turned to Aleist.

"... The defenders."

"Pardon."

"Seek help from the defenders. Use the princess' name if you have to. If you just need to deliver a message, they can still move around the castle freely. Can you give me just a few more details on the state of affairs?"

Aleist reported everything he'd managed to learn.



The captain of the dragoon brigade Oldart faced the supreme commander Fritz.

With Princess Aileen stationed to his side, he couldn't make any rash remarks.

"In short, you're putting us under the commander's control? It's troubling that you're saying something so blatantly obvious, and it's also troubling that you arbitrarily sent my subordinate off to the battlefield. You said it was an area of low priority, but in the present state with the empire attacking on two fronts, one unit's worth of war potential is clearly not up to par. I shall send additional reinforcements."

Oldart's discontentment came from Aileen superseding him, sending Rudel to a warzone unassisted. A dragon was certainly powerful. They were powerful, but a battle was also about numbers.

Sending only one rider was something he couldn't overlook as the captain. And he couldn't forgive that she ordered around one of his men.

Fritz boldly responded.

"As long as their main force lies elsewhere, it is only natural we concentrate our war potential there."

Oldart gave a scornful laugh.

"You sound like you already know which one's their main force... while we



haven't received a lick of information. What could that possibly mean?"

There, Aileen stuck in her mouth. Fritz had faltered ever so slightly, so she was surely to cover for him.

"Now's not the time to speak of such matters. Under Fritz-sama's command, the dragoon brigade will band together and drive back the empire. That is an order."

If she called it an order, he had no choice but to obey.

However—

"If it's an order, I'll obey. I want to get this over with already so I can save my subordinate. How about we have a good talk once I'm back?"

Under Oldart's glare, Fritz.

"Then prepare to depart at once. The dragoon brigade will take the lead to beat down our foe. Based on the speed of their preparations, the main force will depart immediately."

But Aileen added on.

"Dragoon captain... in the case the enemy crosses the border, I will permit an attack. But I won't approve of anything else."

Oldart spoke through a sign.

"I'm well aware. How long do you think we've been protecting the border?"

Aileen simply gave a fearless smile. It was more than enough to tip Oldart off that something was up.

(... Now then, what do I do about this? I guess I'll have Keith move or something.)



It was the Arses House mansion.

Erselica made a desperate plea before her father's room.

"Father, when Chlust-niisama is fighting, why won't the Arses House send reinforcements!?"

No matter how she raised her voice, she never got a response. It wasn't only her father, upon learning of Chlust's predicament, her mother wouldn't attempt any action either.

Having frequently exchanged letters with Chlust, Erselica knew the situation of the border fort in detail. She learned of the Empire's movements from Chlust as well.

On that front, Erselica had supported him to the best of her abilities. But come so far, the notice came that the empire had finally initiated its full mobilization. The Rases House showed no signs of moving.

Around the room, the retainers had gathered.

(If I'd just moved faster.)

A vexed Erselica raised her voice at the door time and again.

"I'm begging you. The preparations are already in order. All that's left is for you to give the order, father, and we will be on our way."

She had already confirmed her father was in the room, and the Arses House had completed its preparations to sortie. Looking at them as an archduke house, they could only send a minuscule number, but that was all Erselica could prepare with all her might.

"There are other lords who have promised us their cooperation. Why must my own father, an archduke, remain stationary when his country is in a time of crisis!?"

Her desperate pleas wouldn't reach her father in the room. Not only that, to Erselica and the retainers gathered before the room—

"What is the meaning of this, how irritatingly noisy!"

— From the other side of the corridor, her mother appeared leading along her servants.

"Mother! You throw in a word too! The fort Chlust-niisama is stationed at is under attack by the empire. I seek permission to send reinforcements!"

Her mother offered a cold rebuttal to her words.

“... That child is the failure of the Arses House. If he puts up a hard fight at the fort and dies in battle, it will at least somewhat recover the Arses House’s reputation. And even if we don’t move, the likes of the empire can be driven back by those dragons.”

Erselica listened on in terror. She shook her head to the side.

“... I’ve heard enough.”

“What’s with that attitude? Someone lock Erselica up. Good grief, causing such a ruckus...”

As her mother tried to leave, she was surrounded by armed knights and soldiers.

The butler by Erselica’s side didn’t find fault in that.

“What is the meaning of this!? Who do you think I am!”

Turning to her clamoring mother, Erselica shot back.

“If you are to take a watchful stance in this crisis, you have no qualifications to lead this house! Bind and imprison my father and mother! We will be sending reinforcements immediately. Tell the lords who’ve promised assistance to dispatch at once.”

While the knights and soldiers moved around, soldiers with axes appeared in front of the room. They destroyed the door and flooded in.

As the soldiers apprehended her, she looked at Erselica.

“Do you understand what you’re doing!? Such an act... no one will ever recognize it!”

The more Erselica watched her mother, the sadder her expression became.

“... There are no vassals here who will assist you. The only ones here are those discontent with your deeds. The others all ran away when I imparted precise information and asked for their cooperation.”

Erselica had put in a request to Lena to have Luecke look into the factional relations. What factions the surrounding feudal lords pledged allegiance to, and what houses had an invested interest.

There were plenty of lords and palace officials who didn't think so kindly of the Arses House's present state that would collapse if things were to go on.

By talking with those people, Erselica had made her own preparations.

"Erselica-sama!"

One of the knights restrained her father and led him out of the room. While he wore a gown, he had nothing but undergarments on underneath.

There were a number of women and it was permeated with the scent of alcohol. Looking down on her father muttering complaints, Erselica spoke.

"Take him away. We don't have time to waste on him."



While the manor was in a boisterous commotion, Lena climbed up to the roof and looked up at the sky.

"... Now then, I should get moving."

Holding her spear, wearing clothing easy to move around in, Lena whistled. That whistle that resounded through the sky, it almost seemed as if it was calling for something.

Sitting right down on the roof, it seemed like Lena was going to stay there and wait until whatever she called for arrived.

"You think that broski of mine's gonna win against fate?"

Curiously, Lena smiled.

From the start, Lena was a peculiar sister. She was Rudel's peculiar sister. At the start, Rudel was able to become more human because Lena was there. When Rudel held no interest for other people, he showed interest towards Lena. At the important times, it was Lena who was involved with Rudel.

Not directly, she had always been indirectly tied in.

"Well, he's my broster, he should be fine."

Lena said and looked at the sky.



The scene shifts to a fort continuing its resistance.

The army led by Askewell of the Gaia Empire had continued minor attacks as if to torment it.

There were a number of reasons, but while they managed to infiltrate foreign soil well enough, they had advanced without receiving anything that could be classified as resistance.

Dispatching units to the towns and villages in the area, they were scraping together supplies.

Keeping a low profile to Askewell's side, Mies looked bitterly at the supplies they had gathered.

In the tent, she reported the present situation to Askewell as he sat in his chair.

"Askewell-sama, the enemy has mostly pulled out. While a small portion of villages have ignored the evacuation order and remained, I believe the enemy commander ordered the civilians in this parts to find refuge as soon as our side started moving."

Askewell quietly muttered.

"I see. Then the monsters must be hungry."

From the start, the black monsters of his army were disposable pieces. And those pieces had their own role in his forces.

The empire was teeming with people. The plan was to migrate to Courtois' plentiful soil, and with that goal in mind, the people living on that land were in the way. Taking care of that disposal was the monsters' job.

"I thought this was a country that could only rely on its dragons, but it looks like it has some staunch men of its own. To let the people flee, and try to hold out at but a small fort."

Mies confirmed their future course with Askewell.

"What should we do? It would be simple to crush them, but we intended to set up a base of operations there, so that would greatly affect the—"

After Mies had said that much, a messenger soldier entered the tent.

“Your Highness! Enemy dragoons are approaching! Gray in color! Two riders!”

Askewell grinned at that report.

“... Perfect timing. Send out the wyvern unit.”

The moment the messenger left the tent, the surroundings were filled with the voices of monsters.

Askewell stood to his feet; Mies followed him outside. Around them, wyverns took to the sky one after the next, with knights in black armor straddling their backs.

They were up against two knights, yet their charge consisted of a few dozens.

Gray dragons.

Dragons domesticated by Courtois, they were said to be the weakest, but even so, they had been a threat to the empire as it was. While the soldier seemed anxious, they looked like they had some hope in the wyvern unit's dispatch.

No, one might say they were sending their prayers. To the empire, the dragons were they symbol of fear. In the past, a single blue dragon had been enough to put them through countless terrifying experiences.

That fear was passed from father to child, succeeded by their grandchildren.

In regards to the two dragoons, the dozens of wyverns surrounded them to carry out their attack. Perhaps as expected of a dragon, they put up a good fight against the wyverns, but in the end, before the difference in numbers, one eventually fell to the ground.

Askewell looked over the scene.

“Looks like three on one will be enough to fight. Their aerial maneuvers are rough, but they should be able to fight well enough.”

The surrounding black monsters and human soldiers gathered to attack the fallen dragoon.

Raising a cheer, the dragon's head was lopped off and hoisted high into the

sky.

“The era of the dragoons is over!”

“Glory to the Empire! Glory to Prince Askewell!”

“Have a look, the other one’s running away!”

Overhead, the dragoon surrounded on all sides received attacks as if it were being made a game of. Even so, four allied wyverns took a fall.

“... If they get in some combat experience, the wyvern unit could become a mainstay of the empire’s forces.”

Askewell sent a sorrowful look at his dead subordinates. They were his precious troops and his comrades. Watching Askewell mourn his fallen comrades, Mies was moved.

“Askewell-sama, you’re too kind.”

The final dragoon fell to the ground. Was it the bond between knight and dragon? The dragon followed his rider to the ground as if to protect him. On land, the knights and soldiers raised cried, and the monsters flocked around knight and dragon.

To the empire, this was the scene they had waited so long for. The once-rulers of the sky, the dragoons falling to their earth, the scene of their own wyvern unit becoming the sky’s new sovereigns.

It meant the era of cowering from Courtois was over.

“Show the heads of knight and dragon to the fort! After we chip their fighting spirit, advise them to surrender!”

The surrounding knights raising cheers, they held up their weapons and thrust their fists towards the heavens.

Within that, his golden hair fluttering behind him, his body clad in black armor, Askewell was a picturesque sight to behold.



“Captain!”

In the first, Chlust was woken from his rest by his subordinate.

He hadn't slept in days, and while he attempted to get in just a few hours, the situation had vehemently changed.

Rising from the bed, Chlust slapped his cheeks to wake up as he received the report.

"What happened?"

"The empire... the empire took out a dragoon!"

Hearing the words, Chlust made off without the chance to grab any proper armor. Once he arrived where there was a good view he saw the heads of two dragons, and the terrible state of two knights lined up in the plaza in front of the fort.

Two imperial knights ordering around black ogres loudly demanded their surrender.

"Bear witness to what Prince Askewell's new unit has made of the dragoons you relied upon! Cowards of Courtois! You have been given the option. Fight for this fort to your deaths or surrender and submit to the empire!"

The imperial knight's words threw the local civilians who remained at the fort into a panic. They had never even imagined that a dragoon could lose.

It had never occurred to Chlust that the dragoons who came to their aid would lose so easily.

"How in the... there's something in the sky."

In the air above them, a dragon-like shadow... no, Chlust was a man born of Courtois. He knew that shadow was different from the dragons of Courtois.

From his knowledge, he could make out what sort of monster it was.

"Why are wyverns... they're supposed to have even harsher temperaments than dragons. No human has ever been able to make a contract with them before!"

Chlust's subordinates were gathered around him, cautiously glancing around.

"Captain, the civilians who didn't flee are demanding an explanation. At this rate, this fortress will become a battle royal!"



The people who fled into the fort and said they wouldn't move until the war was over were beginning to raise a ruckus. They had been certain there was no way they would lose, but hearing of the dragoons' defeat, they were beginning to stir.

"That's why I told them to run... dammit!"

Chlust was cornered into a situation with enemies both inside and out.

It was a small fort.

If the citizens taking refuge inside ran amok, the knights and soldiers would have to fight to save their own skin. When that happened, the fortress insides would turn to hell.

The troops that remained were fighting to protect Courtois. If they had to kill their own citizens, it would lead to a large loss of morale. If it came to that, protecting this fort would be impossible.

Before the fort, the imperial knight yelled.

"If you bring out the fort commander's head, we wouldn't mind setting you up as nobles. Unlike Courtois, the empire pays its dues!"

Loudly, the knight laughed.

Chlust and those around him heard it out in despair. The civilians were beginning to gather around them.

Chlust's subordinate.

"Stand down! Don't try to go out."

They readied their weapons to threaten the evacuated civilians, but those civilians had gripped farm implements, and whatever weapons they could find around the fort.

"I-it's your fault for losing, bastards!"

"If I can become a noble in the empire..."

"We just want to live in peace!"

Chlust regretted leaving his armaments in his room.

(To think I would be killed by those I was to protect... sorry, brother. This is as

far as I go.)

Chlust had begun considering surrendering himself to the enemy. If that would save his men and the people here.

But something passed over the skies of such a fort.

To the skies where those of both Courtois and Gaia raised their heads, a dragon with four, large white wings was falling towards the ground. Once its large build slammed into the soil, the surrounding imperial knights, soldiers, and a great many black monsters were blown off of their feet.

From above, a wyvern opened its mouth to hammer in its breaths, but that mouth pierced through by a large sword of light, the magic storing in its mouth reacted, exploded, and blew off its head.

While a cloud of dust covered everything, a glimmering something let off an explosion of light.

The sounds of screams chimed out in turn, and at the end, the white dragon's large wings blew away the dust.

What appeared was a single knight clad in white armor, his blue mantle fluttering in the wind. Imperial knights and monsters gathering around him. That knight in white armor was soon surrounded.

Chlust muttered—

“... Brother.”



Landing on the ground alongside Sakuya, Rudel leaned the sword in his right hand against his shoulders.

Looking around, there was nothing but enemies.

Two gray dragon heads presented before the fort, the husks of knights were stuck up in unsightly states.

One among them was Rudel's contemporary.

Saas Venia—a dragoon, while he had a bad look in his eyes, he had a knack for looking after people.

Rudel had heard he'd been stationed on the border, and after rushing to help, he had died in battle.

"... You're disrespecting a warrior."

As he sent around a look, the imperial knights and soldiers behind the black monsters raised their voice. Surely they were giving orders for his death. Rudel closed his eyes.

The blue eyes he slowly opened turned red, precisely taking in the movements of his surroundings. Within a sensation as if time was slowly passing by, Rudel spoke.

"I'm sure you all came here knowing you might now return to your fatherland alive."

Matching Rudel's wrath, Sakuya roared into the sky. As surrounding soldiers covered their ears at that ear-shaking din, Rudel rushed forward and cut down the black ogre that had rushed out before him.

It was the sort of black ogre he encountered in his school days, its body covered in the white insignia of one who had once tried to get in his way.

Rudel took a swipe at the net ogre.

"... I take it you're serious. But you won't advance a step further!"

Turning his left hand forward, Rudel manifested a number of swords of light around. The point of each made off towards its own destination, impaling monster and enemy soldier alike.

While one of the knights parried the sword with his blade, it exploded and crumbled his stance. Not letting the opportunity slip by, Rudel closed in and let his sword run from his left shoulder to right hip.

Armor was cut through, blood spouted as a terrible scene spread around.

Sakuya brushed away ogres with her giant arms; she fired off her breath towards the sky. As the airborne wyverns came into contact with her breath, their wings tore, sending them falling to the ground.

In contrast, even if the wyverns' breath hit Sakuya directly, it didn't exhibit any particular effect.

The knight taking command in the back.

“R-retreat! Retreeaaat!!”

The order cemented the knight in Rudel’s mind as the commanding officer, and closing the distance in an instant, he smacked his foe with the shield in his left hand.

The knight commanding from horseback tolled across the ground, while his horse acted up and ran off elsewhere.

The knights around tried to surround Rudel with their spears and swords. Taking a lance thrust at him from a mounted knight in his left hand, he snatched it away, and stuck it into the torso of a knight with a sword.

Returning his own sword to its scabbard, he used a stolen sword to cut at the nearest soldier. Another swift movement, as he cut down monster and human in succession, his form, his movements were truly close to a beast’s.

“You... monster!!”

Blown away by Sakuya, and rapidly sunk into a sea of blood by Rudel, the unit of the empire.

It didn’t even take an hour for everything to be over.

The scene was witnessed by the soldiers and knights of the fort, and the evacuated residents in gross fascination.

When it had ended, Rudel apprehended an unconscious enemy leader. With a wave of his hand, he ordered those watching from the fort to collect the commander from him.

Tossing aside the sword he was holding, Rudel walked over to the husk of a comrade.

“... I’ll get you down. Sakuya, you take care of the dragons.”

‘... Yeah.’

Sakuya recovered the dragon’s heads, and as she gently placed them on the ground, Rudel released his comrade and contemporary from their gruesome fastenings.

To his friend Saas' husk, Rudel made an address.

"I didn't make it in time. I'm sorry... but I'll fight for your share. I shall definitely spread word of your heroism."

Once soldiers raced in from the fort, Rudel looked around. The monsters and soldiers he had killed were littered around, but strangely, the monster dissolved into black smoke and disappeared.

The black fumes ignored the pull of the wind, making off somewhere.

Rudel's expression was harsh as he looked at the sky, but there he heard a nostalgic voice.

"Brother!"

When he turned, there was Chlust, not in a decent piece of armor. He must have hurried, his breathing was considerably rough.

"... You did well to hold out, Chlust."

Chlust didn't know what he was supposed to say. But looking at Rudel, he made a serious face.

"Brother, that was only a small portion of the empire's army. Their main force is still ahead, scraping together supplies from the area. I have to ask, how many reinforcements can we expect?"

Seeing Chlust make the face of a commander, Rudel mood lightened just a bit. But the thought couldn't remain.

"Unfortunately, I was sent as the vanguard. I don't have any definite information on reinforcements."

Chlust hung his head a bit.

"Understood. And thank you... you saved us."

He gave his thanks.

## Chapter 150: Comrade

After entrusting the defenders with a message to Luecke and Eunius, Aleist had come to the gate to slip out of the palace.

Concealing himself in the pillar of a shadow near the gate, he kept a close watch from within its shadow.

(I doubt I'll be able to break through the walls or gate.)

They were bestowed with a special make, an especially high resistance to magic in order to protect the palace.

There were armed soldiers stationed around and an order had been issued for Aleist to be captured on sight.

While he had been able to evade all attempts, the Black Knight's power didn't allow him to teleport. At most, he could sink into and move across shadows.

The sun was high in the sky, leaving little room for him to hide, let alone move. When he hid, only a single stretch formed a conspicuously darker shadow, which might give him off all too easily.

(Drat! I spent so long moving around, that time is... it looks like my parents and the others got away, but...)

Izumi had made for Luecke and Eunius alongside the defenders. It was a stroke of luck that within the uproar of war preparations, it seemed they weren't keeping a proper count of those in the cells.

But Aleist alone was different.

His renown had him on the run from those in the palace affiliated with, or whose superiors were affiliated with Aileen's faction.

(They've sealed the back door and escape ways, so I thought I'd try the gate)

As Aleist considered forcing his way through, the soldiers in front of the gate beckoned to him. He hid himself in surprise, but when one of them removed their helmet, Aleist instantly recognized him as a dear friend from his school days.

It did seem he had known he was hiding in the shadows. The other soldiers couldn't notice, but his friends ended up picking him out.

"Captain, can I go take a piss..." one of them said, separating from his units and racing over towards Aleist.

Circling around the round pillar, Aleist stuck his upper body out from the shadow.

"It's been a while, Aleist."

"Y-yeah, it really has... no, I know now's not the right time to catch up."

It wasn't like Rudel group were Aleist's only associates. While it may be strange to spell it out so plainly, Aleist had a few friends.

Keeping wary of his surroundings,

"Why did you run away? Supreme commander's got to be a huge promotion. Your parents and girlfriends got through... but the palace is going to send someone after them in no time."

Aleist gave a general explanation. That this world was strange, and on top of Aileen running wild he explained in as shortest terms as possible that Rudel was in danger.

His emotions getting the better of him, he didn't know if he was properly getting his thoughts across.

While still confused,

"... Got it. Luckily, the three of us are in the same unit. Makes things convenient."

"Convenient?"

"We'll open the front gate just a bit. Use that opening to break through."

To his friend's proposal, Aleist shook his head to the side.

"No way. You'll get yourself killed."

His friend smiled a bit.

"Play it off well, and it'll end at the dungeons. And you know,"

“You know?”

As Aleist worried, his friend smiled.

“This is the most we can do. Don’t be such a stranger...”

His friend pulled his helmet back down, and running off from behind the pillar, he immediately informed his captain he had returned. After explaining the situation to the other two, the three immediately sprung to motion.

It was necessary to move a mechanism to open the gate; two of them faced the soldiers protecting the lever, while one of them distracted the captain.

And—

“Bastards! What are you doing!?”

By the time the captain noticed, the gate was already half opened. While Aleist hesitated a bit, he soon leapt out from the shadow and made a dash for the gate. To hurriedly close it, the knights and soldiers had flocked around the lever, letting him run through with ease.

A look back, and his friends were being smacked. But in the moment before it slammed down.

“Go! Aleist!!”

They cried. The troops raised a great ruckus, they’d begun to gather. Aleist made a clenched fist, he grit his teeth as he dived into the shadows beyond the gate and sped away.

While the knights tried chasing Aleist shadow, upon shifting to the shadows cast by the town scape, he easily shook them off.

(I’m sorry. I’ll definitely be back to save you!)

Aleist prayed for the safety of his friends.



Into the basement dungeon, three battered knights were shoved in.

Sophina watched from a cell on the opposite side.

“... What did these three do?”



She confirmed it with the soldiers who took them in; the lead soldiers looked down over the three.

“They helped the black knight escape. Good grief, I can’t comprehend why someone would aid a coward fleeing from war. If they really are friends, they should’ve stopped him.”

With work to do, the soldiers soon left the cell.

“Are you friends of the Black Knight?”

The battered three looked to have been beaten quite brutally. While their bones were probably intact, their faces and bodies were ridden with bruises.

One of them muttered.

“Ha, hahaha, that’s right.”

On that answer, Sophina reached her arm through the iron bars. Her left hand let off a faint light as the three writhed in pain, their injured parts acting up.

“Stay put. It’ll be over soon.”

The dungeon’s watchman raced over.

“What are you doing!? Don’t make any funny moves.”

He held up a spear to intimidate her, so after a scoff,

“It’s already done. Don’t tell me you have a problem with treating their injuries? And it’s not like I’m being kept here for committing a crime.”

As the watchman went off with complaints on his breath, Sophina looked at the three raising their bodies. And—

“Now then, you’ve taken some drastic measures, I see. If luck’s against you, your punishments might reach all the way to your families.”

The three gave thanks for the healing magic.

“The magic was a lifesaver. But to think that guy’d look so serious... and when we heard Princess Aileen was involved, our generation can’t help but be suspicious.”

Rudel and Aleist’s generation was one especially exposed to Aileen’s

preferential treatment of Fritz. They had witnessed and formed a doubt.

Sophina had spent a few years at the academy as Fina's guard. Through that relationship, she was relatively knowledgeable on the academy's circumstances.

"I see... your year was one with a strong doubt towards Princess Aileen. In that case,"

As Sophina considered adding these three to her war potential, the footsteps of an armed group resounded through the basement dungeon. The shrill sound of scraping metal, and the screams of watchmen.

"W-what are you—!"

The watch instantly fell silent, as a tall gathering peered into to confirm the contents of the cell.

One of the three,

"Tiger tribe? Why are they in a place like..."

A tall, armed tiger tribe young man spotted Sophina. Taking along the two, he walked hunched-up through the narrow-looking passage.

"I take it you are Sophina-san. The princess orders you to get ready."

Hearing that, Sophina.

"So it's come. You're here anyway, so get my subordinates and those three too. It's best to have as much manpower as possible."

Once the tiger tribe men opened the lock, Sophina met up with her subordinates in the other cells.

(Now then, the fact that we're moving means...)



"NUHOHOHOoHoooo!"

Rolling on the bed, Fina was getting her fill of vacation in a room far too luxurious for a prison.

"The seedy cheap fluff of this pillow is irresistible. If it was just a bit fluffier, it would be perfect."

She was shoved in a cell right after pulling an all-nighter: after eating, she crashed, woke up, took a bath, then fell asleep all over again. Leading such a no-good lifestyle, Fina found there were no lifeforms to her tastes or demi-humans around, so she embraced her pillow and rolled across the bed.

And yet.

“Hah, and now I’m bored. It really doesn’t hold up to real fluff. Rather, I’ll make do with a sewer rat, someone, anyone come out. I just want to give you food and rear you to liven the place up a bit.”

Speaking as if she was scolding who she was up to a moment before to learn some self-reflection, even placed in this situation, Fina was expressionless and calm.

Getting somewhat a feel of the ruckus in the palace, she sensed the main players were moving, so she had gone into preparations.

Moving her expressionless body, Fina went into some warm-up stretches as she spoke.

“My word, when you already know it’s going to happen, it sure is quick to prepare for. Though thanks to that, we can move just as fast.”

Breaking into a peculiar dance, Fina loosened up her body before sitting on the bed. She corrected her posture, keeping as motionless as a doll.

It was at that moment she heard a boisterous voice from the door.

‘W-who are—!’

‘Call for backu—!’

She remained stationary throughout the ruckus. When the door opened, a full-armed Mii popped in her head. She could see other demi-human soldiers and knights through the gap in the door.

“P-princess, we’ve come to save you.”

Fina gave a small, expressionless nod. It wasn’t just to Mii, she had to show her surrounding allies the sort of character she was.

“I’m glad you could make it, Mii. I’m sure you’ve all had a hard time. But here

is where the true battle begins.”

The knight and soldier demi-humans directed salutes at Fina. An armored group—before the members of the defenders, Fina laughed within.

(The fluff brigade! The fluffy legion based around the cat tribe... aah, what happiness. If only master were here, it'd be perfect.)

Somehow containing her own writhing, Fina walked down the corridor.

“We will immediately begin suppressing sectors individually. How many troops remain?”

As Fina confirmed it, Mii walking beside her looked over her memo.

“Two thousand have been left at the palace. The royal guard is to remain, and it seems the nobles in Princess Aileen’s faction are at the palace as well.”

At Mii reporting in a fluster, Fina endured her urge to drool.

“And our numbers?”

“A-around eight hundred. She took action earlier than planned, so we couldn’t gather too great of a number. There are units of ours that were absorbed into the expedition.”

Hearing the personnel she prepared had been added into Fritz army, Fina wanted to click her tongue.

(I thought I could get two thousand with room to spare... well, we’re in a race against time. We’ve got to do a clean sweep of sister’s faction and their collaborators. Best done while it still all counts as my own achievement.)

With dark thoughts on his mind, Fina shifted towards enacting a plan she’d been furthering for a long while. It was a means for when her sister took strong measures, and a means Fina didn’t want to have to use.

(Now how about we start building my country?)

... If she could make an expression, Fina would surely have a muddy-black smile slathered over her face.



Surrounded by defenders, Izumi managed to come into contact with Luecke

and Eunius.

After explaining the situation, the two of them—

“... They’re demanding reinforcements from us too. That will put us under Fritz’ command.”

As Luecke said that with a sour face, Eunius discontentedly plucked his hair.

“Rudel was sent off alone, and Aleist chased after... those two idiots aren’t thinking a thing.”

Eunius labeled Rudel and Aleist as fools, and sure enough, Izumi also thought there might have been a better way they could’ve gone about it.

But saying that now wouldn’t get them anywhere.

“I want to somehow help out those two. Would you be able to lend your strength?”

At Izumi’s plea, Luecke reached a prompt verdict.

“There are too many strange points. I’ll return to my territory at once, and send troops your way. But the problem is how I’m supposed to persuade father.”

To his quandary, Eunius,

“Just give him a good smack-around. That always seems to work at my place; though admittedly, I’ve never won against him before.”

In the time Izumi wondered if that was alright, Luecke had already shifted to action.

“I’m heading off. Izumi, what are you going to do?”

She touched a hand to her chest.

“I will make for Rudel as a reinforcement. He should be wanting as much war potential as he can get.”

Luecke was about to open his mouth, but seeing Izumi’s serious eyes shut him up.

Eunius spoke in his place.

“You’ve got your own stubborn streak. Throwing units at the enemy one at a time isn’t the efficient way to do war. What’s more, adding a single member to the battlefield accomplishes nothing. Restrain yourself and either come with me or Luecke.”

Izumi shook her head. Her black ponytail swayed.

“If that doesn’t make it in time, I get the feeling I won’t forgive myself for the rest of my life. So even if it’s just the slightest bit faster...”

Before he could finish those words, a single knight entered the room. Dragging along Vargas, who’d been keeping watch outside, the individual who entered with a smile was Oldart.

“Oh, now look who it is. Izumi-chan, the special inspector shouldn’t be abandoning her job. What are you going to do if Rudel goes off the rocker when you’re not watching?”

“Captain Oldart? Umm, I’m—”

Oldart let two knights into the room. One of them was a silver-haired female knight, her ears perked straight up.

The other was a handsome, slender male knight.

Bennet and Keith.

“Keith, Deliver the archdukes’ eldest sons to their territories. And don’t lay a hand on them. Listen, I’m serious!”

On Oldart’s serious expression, Luecke and Eunius retreated a step to look at Keith.

The one in question,

“To save a precious subordinate, and to save a dear friend, I gladly take up this mission to deliver these men home. Ah, what a wonderful day it is. For such beauty is the friendship between men.”

Oldart ignored Keith.

“There are some problems with his personality, but he’s got the top aerial capabilities in the dragoon brigade. Now onto the dragoon brigade’s idol...

Bennet-chan, take Izumi-chan with you, and join Rudel in the fray. Ah, if you spot the black knight along the way, pick him up.”

Bennet saluted.

“Understood, captain. He’s a precious subordinate to myself as well, I will certainly make it in time. But whether I find the black knight or not is up to question.”

Oldart scratched his head.

“That one’s a miscalculation on my part. Well, right now, it’s more important to hurry up. There’s no time. We’ll send around our support as quickly as possible... you just have to hold out until then. Don’t push yourself.”

Bennet and Keith answered their usually carefree captain’s serious expression with earnest salutes.

Izumi thought to herself.

(I can only hope this is enough... Rudel.)



An army of monster that continued to no end.

As if they didn’t know the notion of pause, they continued invading the fort, wave after wave. There was no plan, and the empire had gathered numbers great enough that one wasn’t needed.

In the fort, Rudel sheathed his sword, sleeping as if to embrace it.

He sat on a wooden crate, around him, the bonfires were kept alit as the continuing enemy offense was dealt with. In the narrow fort, Sakuya would take the blows of enemies that managed to make it in.

Before hundreds of thousands of monsters, the reason a small fort could hold out was due to the grace of a gaia dragon subspecies, thanks to the defense of Sakuya’s tough skin.

Her large arms brushed away the monsters clinging to its walls, but even so before the violence of hundreds of thousands, they were pressed into a hard battle.

A dragon like Sakuya could continue fighting for a few days, but the human Rudel was easily beset by his limits. Even so, he managed to fight on two nights and two days, so he was plenty inhuman himself.

Chlust had stationed trustworthy knights around Rudel.

Around, the civilians from around the fort who'd lost their place to flee raised a ruckus in their terror.

"Why aren't you fighting!? If you're a knight, then fight!"

"Let me out! I'll get away from the fort, just let me out!"

"I never heard it would be like this! You can't pin any of this on me!"

Blindly faithful to the dragoons, and feeling betrayed, the anger of the people was directed unto a resting Rudel. Even if he had fought to the edge of his limit, in this state of panic, no matter how they explained, they couldn't expect understanding.

(That's why I told them to run. And even if they run now,)

It was too late to run. Far too late. They were surrounded by the empire's army of monsters, and anyone who stepped out would be no more than monster feed.

The fort's defense had become a little more reliable with Sakuya's arrival, but a situation where they had to keep wary of both inside and out still persisted.

A few hours after he began resting, Rudel slowly rose up.

"Brother! You can sleep some more! In that state—"

Seeing Rudel's stamina and mana expended, Chlust wanted to use every means at his disposal to get his brother just a little more rest. But as Rudel lifted his face.

"The night will soon open up. When that happens, the enemy movements will be even more active than before. Could I have a bit of food?"

Rudel wouldn't show a pained expression; Chlust ordered one of his men to prepare a meal.





The army led by the first prince of the empire... the crown prince measured out the right timing to advance near the border.

Under a large pavilion, the crown prince was surrounded by his generals.

“The wyvern unit is ready.”

“Crown prince, the time has finally come for us to launch a counteroffensive on Courtois!”

“There are a hundred to two hundred dragoons at most, but the empire’s wyvern unit surpasses five hundred. Even numerically, we hold the advantage.”

Hearing out those statements,

“On this occasion, we are mere decoys. Rather than victory, our priority shall be to shave away their foot soldiers. Hold the dragoons in place with the wyvern unit, and use that space and our numbers to put a dent in their army.”

At the crown prince’s declaration, the surrounding generals quietly nodded. When it came to the battlefield, Courtois places heavy stress on their dragoons. For that sake, their foot soldiers were in short supply.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, the empire had more foot soldiers than they knew what to do with. With Askewell leading his monster army, a majority of the human soldiers came under the crown prince’s command. Put up against Courtois’ soldiers in both quality and quantity, they would win.

And there was meaning in prioritizing chipping down their foot soldiers.

One of the generals,

“If they lose their foot soldiers, it will be impossible for them to occupy their land. No matter how powerful the dragoons may be, foot soldiers are still a necessity.”

The crown prince looked at the table laid out for him and the generals. A map had been spread over it, with the formation of the imperial army waiting intently for Courtois’ main force to come laid out in wooden pieces.

“... There is no need to win. Defeat as many soldiers and commanding officers within our capabilities. In an aerial battle, our wyvern unit will never win against Courtois’ dragoons in technical skills. Then we must knock Courtois down so

hard it will take them ten, twenty years to recover. In that time, the empire's crops will rise from the rich soil we have taken. For that is true victory for the empire!"

When the crown prince stood, the generals stood with him. Their expressions were all the epitome of severity. They could finally get one back at Courtois, who had tormented them for many a long year. The generals also understood this was a single important battle for the empire to make a comeback.

While Courtois had been protected by the dragoons, the empire was placed into the harshest of times. And those times had bred a powerful land force.

Imperial soldiers... their quality was higher than Courtois' average fighter. Their fighting spirit was higher than it ever could be.

The crown prince gave a slight smile, he gripped his right hand into a fist and held it up high.

"In this battle, the empire's future hangs on everyone's performance. And I am certain we will reign victorious... victory to the empire!"

"To the empire!"

The highest ranking of his generals following on from the crown prince's cry, the generals raised their voices in succession. Far more unified than Courtois, they were a foe one couldn't drop their guard around.



— Delivered home via Keith, Luecke met with his father, the head of his house at the Halbades House castle.

Vast, apart from the window, every surface off the office his father processed paperwork in was covered with bookshelves reaching up to the ceiling. Well-set hair and beard, his clothing was also prim and proper, a man who looked visibly high-strung.

He wouldn't even look at his son Luecke who'd come home.

"... So, you're telling me to dispatch Halbades House troops because you want to save a friend? Going as far as to oppose the kingdom? I had my hopes on you, but now I wonder what I was looking at."

At the words of his father, Luecke clenched his fist and grit his teeth. He expected it would come to this, and negotiating with that predetermined result in mind, Luecke had merely reaffirmed it.

He desperately moved his mouth, speaking of profits to the Halbades House.

“There is a high probability Princess Aileen is moving of her own accord, and more unnatural than anything is that—”

“Probability? Unnatural? The moment you move on wishful thinking is the moment you fail. You’re not at an age where you can’t understand that, are you?”

His paperwork finished, Luecke’s father returned his quill to its pen stand and capped off his ink vial. He reviewed the documents as he waited for the ink to dry.

Sitting deep into his chair, he closed his mouth and shut his eyes. Luecke’s voice grew rough.

“Then I’ll head out alone if I have to.”

To Luecke.

“I know you hold affection for the daughter born to an Arses House concubine. Are you throwing away your life for her? Be good, and I wouldn’t mind you taking her as a concubine of your own. Give it another thought.”

Luecke scoffed at his father’s cold words.

“Hah, I’d rather you not belittle me. I’ll seduce the woman I love on my own terms. But a friend... Rudel is a dear friend to me. If I let him die, I won’t be able to forgive myself.”

Resting an elbow on his desk, Luecke’s father spoke.

“I see. Then I’ll send reinforcements, though I don’t know if you’ll make it in time. I’m busy over here. The matter’s in your hands.”

Luecke had turned his back to his father, the head, and was about to leave the room. Seeing that back, the head gave a tired mutter.

“... Good grief, you weren’t that sort of kid.”

Luecke stopped in his track.

“... Certainly, perhaps I’ve changed. But I personally take it for the better.”

Beaten down by his persistence, the head called out to Vargas, who was stationed outside the room.

“... Vargas, are you there?”

“Y-yes!”

Rudel’s upperclassman, Vargas was also Luecke’s guard. He was, at present, a knight of the Halbades House leading his own unit. He had been quite worried about Rudel, and perhaps he intended to sortie with Luecke as he was already wearing his armor.

“I shall be heading to the palace on a separate matter. Know you will only have five thousand troops to move. I will require one thousand of my own.”

“Father?”

As Luecke turned, the head smiled a bit.

“You’re still a child, Luecke... did you think I didn’t know a thing? I’d long since grasped Princess Aileen’s suspicious movements. I’m sure that Diade will also be moving. And listen well... if you’re a man of an Archduke House, show enough ardor to make your side the one that wins. You go to your friend. I’ll do something about the palace. It seems Princess Fina’s already moving, after all.”

Liecke was a little dumbfounded by his father’s words, but he soon nodded and called to Vargas.

“Let’s go, Vargas!”

“Leave it to me, young master!”

“Don’t call me young master! Dammit, I’m going to reeducate you one of these days!”

Luecke had moved in order to save Rudel.



In the courtyard of the Diade House castle, Eunius was being knocked off his feet by his father.

His strong-muscled father wasn't as tall as him. But his arms were much thicker, and his body was ridden with large scars.

They were scars of the battlefield. His short hair standing on end, his stiff beard made him more of a brave warrior than a nobleman.

"... Concede the battlefield to you? When did you become more important than me, son?"

When Eunius wiped his mouth with a sleeve, it turned red, but paying no mind, he glared at his father.

"I'm going to save a pal! Why do I have to deal with that pissy Princess Aileen at the palace!? You go take the palace, old man!"

His thick eyebrows twitch, Eunius's father punched Eunius again to blow him away. But this time, Eunius endured and returned the punch.

Smacked by his son, his father spaced out just a bit, but bursting into laughter, this time he smacked Eunius without holding anything back.

Blown all the way into the wall, Eunius fell to the ground.

"Nice fist. Very well, I'll respect that punch and your tongue with the plains of war. But I won't accept anything apart from victory. If you skulk back without any distinguished service, I'm rebuilding you from the ground up."

Eunius stood and brushed off the dirt clinging to his clothing.

"You old fogey... too strong for your own good."

Looking at his son Eunius with a smile, Eunius' father barked orders to his subordinates around.

"I'm heading to the palace. You all follow Eunius. If that idiot tries running, give him a kick in the ass towards the battlefield."

Eunius spat his saliva at that unthinkable line from an archduke. A majority-red spit stuck to the grass, but paying it no mind, Eunius looked at the lines of soldiers.

Stationed close to the border, the elite gathering of Diade House vassals.

Strapping on their armor, they turned to Eunius and stood in file.

“... Run? If I ran and abandoned a friend, I’ll regret it for life. This alone is where I won’t run.”

And as he walked off towards his vassals, Eunius declared.

“Aight, I’m off to carve the Diade House name into those foolish imperials. You lot, try ‘n keep up!”

Eunius’ words were followed by a loud response. While the Diade House was rough, that was simply the gathering of warriors they were.

Eunius looked at his men hurriedly moving around.

(Don’t know if we’ll make it in time. Rudel, don’t overdo it.)

And as Eunius looked to the sky, the sun was blocked out by a flying something, making a shadow.



Near the Hardie House estate in the royal capital, Aleist ran into Nate.

“Senpai, the Hardie House manor has already been occupied.”

“Nate? What about my parents!”

To a panicking Aleist, Nate closed one eye in a wink.

“They already got out of the city. Said something about returning to the territory and preparing for war. Your house sure is radical, senpai. I’m worried whether or not I can keep up.”

Aleist half-smiled seeing Nate as her usual self. She wore a robe around her body, and nearby a hippogryph was stationed taking on horse form. It was Nate’s partner.

To its side, with long black hair, a monster with red lines running down its horn... the Nightmare Heath stood as well.

Approaching its master Aleist, it touched its horn to him.

“Heath, you waited for me.”

Aleist’s armor and baggage were loaded on its back. He had come to collect them, but it did seem Nate was being considerate.

“Nate, you stayed too? What about that nameless knight brigade, or would you prefer shadow brigade?”

As Aleist tilted his head, Nate touched a hand to her brow.

“They’re doing their work. I, well see... I’m your fiancé, so I came to support you. I’ll follow you wherever you go.”

Seeing Nate at her usual tempo, Aleist gave a bitter smile. A voice called from behind him as well.

“Nate, you... are you trying to promote yourself?”

“Dirty. Nate, you’re playing dirty.”

There, Seli and Juju met up with them, wearing their equipment.

“Eh? H-huh?”

To Aleist’s snowballing confusion, the female camp gathered one after another. A woman who was the daughter of a merchant came over to Aleist.

“Aleist-sama, I shall be the one to safely deliver you out of the capital.”

“Oy, that’s the only part you’ll be of any use at all!”

“Rather, isn’t this quite a number?”

“Huh? Didn’t know you were joining in.”

Aleist looked at the gathered members. And despite his confusion.

“Err... I’m putting up a bit of resistance to the kingdom, and no matter how you cut it, I’ll be in a terrible position after this. So anyway, if possible, I’d quite like if you forgot about me and moved on.”

To that, Aleist’s academy junior Seli spoke.

“What are you talking about!? If you folded to such an order and became supreme commander, I’d have cut off our engagement then and there. To save a friend, Aleist-sama who stood in the trust sense against the kingdom’s crisis is the only one worthy of being my husband.”

Juju’s face likewise flushed red.

“Aleist, you really are cool.”

Aleist thought.

(... Huh? Why is everyone following me? Didn't mom say something about knowing where you stand... rather, why every one of them? I see some people here I'm not even engaged to...)

The females that came there were too numerous to count on two hands.



# Chapter 151: The Other Reincarnation

The Arses House manor.

Many armed knights and soldiers crowded into the stretch from the gate to the front door.

In the noisy state, preparations were underway to intercept the Gaia Empire encroaching on the national border. While the troops had gathered, it wasn't the best gathering.

Two thousand had been scraped together, but both their equipment and training fell short.

Sitting atop the roof, Lena Arses looked over them with a stretch and a yawn.

"With our territory, it'll be hard to get any more."

Their misgovernment was running its course.

When they heard of Courtois' crisis, there were even nobles and knights who fled. The soldiers were few to gather, making it evidently clear how little adoration the Arses House held.

That they could gather two thousand even so must have been their status as Archdukes.

Looking at troop numbers far too low for the scope of their territory, Lena spotted Erselica conversing with a knight.

"Erselica's gotten around quite a bit, but this is going to be harsh."

Even if they marched out now, and gained the assistance of the nobles who would cooperate, it would take time to reach the border. Any missteps, and they wouldn't make it in time.

Lena hung her spear over her shoulder and looked up at the sky.

Nostalgic... a truly nostalgic wind swept over her. Feeling the abnormal flow of air fanned by a dragon's wings, she leisurely stood.

A blue, beautiful dragon blatantly glaring at her before her eyes—Mystith

looked down over Lena.

While the surroundings grew panicked, Lena could be no calmer.

‘I’ve found myself quite the impertinent human, I have. I don’t know where you learned it, but your whistle— reached me.’

She had whistled at the sky. But that was no ordinary whistle.

It was a whistle to summon a dragon. To be more precise, it was the whistle that had been taken up between Marty and Mystith. A whistle that could be heard no matter where the other might be.

Lena turned to Mystith with a smile.

“I don’t really remember the specifics. But you know... I thought I could do it. And I thought you would come for me.”

Flapping her wings, Mystith narrowed her eyes to gaze at Lena.

‘... So that’s how it is.

Opening her mouth in a laugh, Mystith addressed the young girl.’

‘It’s been a while, Marty... you’ve gotten quite cute when I wasn’t looking.’

Lena laughed alongside her.

“Right you are, Mystith. But I’m sorry, but there’s barely anything I remember. Right now I’m Lena... Lena Arses, and a girl. And... I want to save my brother. Could I have your cooperation?”

Mystith slowly lowered herself onto the ground, bringing her eye-level to Lena’s height.

‘So you want me to lend a hand. But Marty—’

“It’s Lena. I’m Lena Arses, Mystith.”

Lena said with a smile.

“I want to save my brother.”

‘To think you were Rudel’s little sister. Is this some sort of fate?’

On Mystith’s words, Lena hung her head a bit in thought.

It wasn't like she knew everything. She simply had a slight hunch she had a past she didn't know. It was impossible for her to determine whether that was true or just her delusion.

(I think I remembered when I was with broski. Right, that time when he came over with my—the book the past me wrote.)

While it was vague, it happened when Rudel brought her a book she had written in a past life. At that moment, Lena remembered a time before.

A stranger's memory. And the fact that a past life self existed, to Lena at the time, it was an exceedingly heavy truth to swallow?

Just who was she? She started to think her own existence was a fabrication. Yet to Lena, Rudel would speak on and on about just how great Marty was. He would preach honest praise, strengthening both their aspirations to be a dragoon—

“... My brother's an idiot, isn't he.”

‘... He is.’

Mystith openly agreed with that one.

“When I looked at my brother like that, it felt so idiotic to think too hard about everything. Not like I wasn't an idiot myself. I decided not to think too hard. It's a new life after all. Why not have some fun with it? But...”

This time, she was going to live her life as Lena. That's why she never thought she would involve Mystith in her life.

“Surely, there was some reason I was my brother's little sister, I think.”

Lena said and stroked Mystith.

Mystith spread her wings wide, she seemed delighted at Lena's touch.

‘Welcome back, Marty. And it's a pleasure to meet you, Lena Arses. You are my third partner.’



At the palace, Fritz looked at the edge of the sword he'd been given.

Looking over that sword, embedded with gemstones and made with the latest

technology, he confirmed his preparations were in order before tucking it into its sheath.

“Fritz-sama, the preparations to depart are complete. And it does seem the black knight made it out of the capital.”

“Got it.”

Ritz said and left the room, heading for the palace courtyard where his dragon awaited.

His subordinate following behind made an anxious face.

“Fritz-sama, there’s no need for you to personally subjugate the black knight —”

An irritated Fritz glared at his subordinate before increasing his walking pace.

“Do you think I’ll lose or something?”

Fritz was impatient. It was all well and good that he became Supreme commander, but it was quite clear to him that his surroundings didn’t accept him.

Without any achievements to speak of, Fritz had completely become a decoration. His last ray of hope, Aileen, seemed to be under the impression if that would keep him out of harm’s way, it would be fine.

(Like I could accept that.)

The existences called Rudel and Aleist were a hindrance to him. Defeating Aleist who ran away was his last opportunity to demonstrate his own abilities.

(Even if he’s the black knight, I have a dragon on my side. Like hell I’d lose.)

He’d obtained a new sword.

It was a powerful blade, just by the look of it, and when he actually tried using it, it truly was fearsome. With that might, Fritz would defeat Aleist, demonstrate his own strength, and become supreme commander not only in name alone.

(I won’t let myself become a decorative piece.)

Going out with that on his mind, Fritz looked at the gray dragon on standby in

the courtyard. His partner, upon seeing him turned his back. The surrounding servants looking after it distanced themselves as Fritz jumped on and wrung out his voice.

“We’re striking down the black knight. Now fly!”

Abiding by Fritz’ order, the gray dragon flapped its wings and rose into the sky.



A few horse-drawn carriages left the outer wall of the royal capital.

Out of the luggage loaded into the back of one, Aleist popped his face.

“W-we somehow managed.”

With some peace of mind, having rounded the outermost bounds of the city, Aleist looked around with a relieved expression. His faithful steed Heath was pulling the carriage in disguise.

He remained on guard a while, but there were no signs of enemy attack. A few kilometers away, Aleist showed his whole body from the shadows of the luggage crates.

“Well now, I was worried they would notice, but it looks alright.”

Following on from Aleist, the female members appeared one after the next.

“Even so, at our pace, the time to the border is—”

All of a sudden, Aleist looked up at the cloth stretched over the ceiling, promptly leaping out of the carriage and looking up at the sky.

A gray dragon was headed their way from the castle, and looking around, there was a strange scarcity of passersby using the main road.

It was the road that led to the capital, quite an unnatural state of affairs.

“So they did notice.”

Shedding a cold sweat, Aleist pulled his pair of swords from their sheaths. As the dragon flapped its wings to maintain its position overhead, he heard Fritz’ voice.

“Did you think you left unnoticed? Well so be it. Black Knight Aleist, you are going to die here.”

As the gray dragon opened its mouth about to fire its breath, Aleist enveloped his surroundings in a sphere of his own shadow to harden his defense.

Yet before a dragon’s breath, Aleist’s defenses were torn down all too easily.

“—!”

With his defenses breached, Aleist looked up to see Fritz’ descent.

The women around him readied their weapons, but as they tried to cut at him, the Dragon landed to intimidate them. Aleist redirected his stance at the beast before him.

“What a bother. We’re in a hurry here.”

Sensing Aleist’s panic, Fritz laughed a bit.

“You’re not going to make it regardless. Instead of your useless plight, please just die by my blade.”

When Fritz drew his sword, Aleist looked perplexedly at it.

(Haven’t I see that sword somewhere...)

Fritz cut at him. Was it the weapon’s specs, or perhaps his own ability?

He had gotten quite a bit stronger than before.

“I always wanted to cut you down like this. I can’t forget my grudge from the academy!”

The grudge he spoke of involved Aleist instantly taking him out at the Academy Tournament. Thanks to that, Fritz had been terribly belittled by those around him.

Blocking Fritz’ slack with both blades, Aleist kicked forward to destroy his footing. But Fritz took distance and cut in again. Aleist parried it with the sword in his left hand, only for Fritz to contain Aleist’s right arm with his own left.

(This bloke’s far stronger than last time...)

The gemstone embedded in Fritz’ sword let off a light. The sword was

strengthening his body.

“It’s water under the bridge! What are you even doing here!? You’re—the supreme commander, aren’t you!?”

Aleist took distance as he fired a few spears made from his own shadow at Fritz, but Fritz cut them down.

An irritated Aleist.

Inside, his anger towards Fritz was welling up

(You’re the supreme commander, dammit. What are you doing here!? Go prepare for war or something.)

As the Kingdom of Courtois readied itself for invasion, it was unthinkable that the army’s commander personally came out to defeat Aleist.

From Aleist’s point of view, he wanted to come to Rudel’s aid without a second to lose.

Fritz laughed. But his smile was a dark one.

“Supreme commander? At this rate, I’ll be a decoration. No merit or achievement. Who’d seriously listen to my opinion? ... Made light of for being a commoner, mocked by the nobles. They treat me like I’m your replacement... like I can put up with that!”

Rushing at Aleist, Fritz went into a consecutive stream of cuts. Skillfully handling them with two swords, Aleist cried out as the sparks flew around him.

“Like I care! That’s what you asked for!”

From Aleist’s point of view, Fritz’ circumstances were the least of his worries. Diving into his shadow to avoid one of Fritz’ attacks, he moved behind him to cut him down.

Yet in Fritz’ time of crisis, the dragon roared, averting Aleist’s attention.

“Dammit! If the dragon weren’t there, it’d be over in no time!”

Irksomely taking distance, Aleist saw his comrades taking up positions to surrounding Fritz.

(Even if we all go at him at once, the dragon will get in the way. This guy’s out

here playing for own merits...)

If Fritz really intended to crush Aleist, he could have managed by riding his dragon and launching breath attacks from that sky.

In that instance, Aleist would make it look like he was blown away, covertly recovering his members to overcome the situation. Contriving a means of escape in a corner of his mind, Aleist turned Fritz a smile.

“Are you satisfied, winning under a dragon’s protection... Fritz?”

In his attempted provocation, Aleist looked at his face to confirm his irritation.

With a furrowed brow, Fritz readied his sword.

“I’m different from a pathetic man who’s protected by his women.”

Aleist laughed.

“Kahah! That so. Never thought I’d hear that from someone protected by Princess Aileen and allowed to do whatever he pleases. You mean to tell me it wasn’t Princess Aileen who appointed you as Supreme Commander in the first place?”

Seeing Fritz grit his teeth, Aleist thought.

(I see, so he noticed. That’s why he’s forcing himself to kill me. But look, kid...)

“... You, you really need to look at a mirror. You prattle on about commoners and nobles, but in the end, you’re only looking out for yourself.”

Aleist said, despite his thoughts.

(Well, not like I’m one to speak.)

For now, enraging Fritz was the priority. Reaching a hand behind his back, he signaled for his comrades to gather behind him.

His comrades slowly moved into position.

“A wealthy bastard like you who’s got everything can’t understand what—”

“Yeah, I can’t. I’m not going to sugarcoat it... but what does that make you? Protected by Princess Aileen, she even made you supreme commander. And yet, people aren’t listening to you, so you go off on your own to take me out?”



Didn't you despise those blasted nobles who ignored their people and went off on flights of fancy? Man, you really have it wonderful. I'm sure they'll sing songs of praise. Of that damn fool out lusting for glory."

From Aleist's point of view, the commander going out front and fighting was unthinkable.

Of course, he only thought so because he knew a past life.

As Fritz said, those placed under a knight with no deeds of arms, no real life experience could only be anxious.

Anyone would prefer an achieved soul abundant in experience.

"Fritz, you're becoming the person you hate most. I can tell. I'm not too different. So—"

"—You're the same as me? Impossible. That's definitely impossible!"

In the end, Aleist's compassion came out. He wanted Fritz to somehow notice, because he got the feeling he was practically looking at himself.

His past self—his past portion so stuck up looked the same as Fritz to him.

But his words wouldn't reach.

Turning expressionless, Fritz moved to the side of where he was standing.

"That's enough. Burn away."

The moment Fritz stepped away, the form of a gray dragon, a breath prepared in its wide-open mouth came into sight.

(Here it comes!)

Measuring out the right time, Aleist was about to move to rescue his party.

But it was there, the dragon suddenly closed its mouth, picked up Fritz, and soared into the sky.

"Wah! Oy, I didn't order you to—"

It must have been unexpected for Fritz as well. He was panicking.

Where Fritz had been a moment ago, a mass of water—a number of orbs showered down. They burst upon colliding with the ground, soaking Aleist and

his cohorts.

Aleist looked to the sky—

“—Bennet-san!”

Riding a dragon with blue scales, the form of a small-built young girl with silver hair.

“Sorry for that. Couldn’t hold back.”

Bennet said, intimidating her opponent with her own dragon. The difference between a wild dragon and a bred one was far too different from the get-go. To add to that, the difference in strength between its partner Bennet and Fritz was great as well.

The gray dragon retrieved Fritz and retreated for the palace.

“Aleist!”

It wasn’t just Bennet on the Dragon’s back. Izumi was there with her.

“Get on. We’re on a direct route to Rudel.”

Aleist nodded, immediately gathered his comrades and put them to preparations.



Having returned to the palace, Fritz immediately reported to Aileen that the dragoon brigade had turned coat.

However—

“Fritz-sama... We have already received a report from Captain Oldart of the Dragoon Brigade that a portion of the dragoons have defected. However, we are in a state of affairs where we are unable to chase after them.”

Around a troubled-sounding Aileen, the knights of good pedigrees waited upon her. Taking the name of guards, the knights who were stationed near Aileen in Fritz’ place.

They looked at Fritz with eyes of scorn.

“You should really get a grip, high and mighty supreme commander. At this

very moment, you are the responsible party for all military affairs.”

When he was told it wasn't supposed to be Aileen receiving these reports, Fritz clenched his fists. The knights looked at him and laughed.

Aileen spoke to soothe him.

“They shall receive the appropriate recompense after the war. Does that work out?”

Aileen said as she sought confirmation from the knights around her. With their nods, an order was handed down to Fritz.

“Then Fritz-sama. As our general, why don't you go take down the foolish Gaia Empire invading upon our lands?”

Fritz kneeled and accepted the order.

“Yes, Princess Aileen.”

But he was conflicted inside.

Despite becoming supreme commander, the knights—the young nobles of good households made light of him, and he was being sent off to the battlefield as a mere decoration.

(... What the hell am I even doing here.)

Aleist's words, 'you're becoming the person you hate most,' abruptly flashed through his head.

## Chapter 152: Fina's Counterattack

At the dragoon brigade headquarters, preparations to sortie were underway.

Contrary to his usual insincerity, the Captain Oldart was issuing orders with a serious face.

Readied for takeoff, the dragons stood in file, the forms of their partner dragoons on their backs a magnificent spectacle.

Close to a hundred had lined up. The scene that unfolded was one that upon which, it wouldn't be strange if anyone was already convinced of another victory.

"The old empire never learns. Well, I'm sure they have some prospects..."

Oldart groaned, knowing well they were no fools; his vice-captain Alejandro shed a cold sweat as he walked over.

He was followed behind by people who weren't allowed to be there.

(That Alejandro, he's as spineless as ever.)

The one following him was a certain Fina, surrounded by demi-human knights. The dragoons around raised a ruckus.

"Oldart, you have a summons from the princess."

Contrasting Alejandro's panic, Oldart spread out both hands with a smile.

"Well if it isn't her highness, the second princess. What brings you to such a sweltering place."

The flurried haste of the palace. Added to the unreasonable orders, and Aileen's seemingly suspicious movements—Oldart had an inkling something had happened in the Palace.

He hit upon that Fina coming here must have some sort of meaning.

Fina expressionlessly addressed him.

"I would be very much obliged if you could lend me just a few of your dragoons, Oldart-dono."

Before Fina's inability to show expression, Oldart knew this was going to be difficult as he scratched his head.

"Dear me, what could you mean by that? Haven't you noticed we're in a bit of a crisis here?"

Fina gave a small nod, touching her right hand to her chest.

"Yes, I am aware. Should I say that is precisely why? A moment ago, I was imprisoned by my sister—Aileen."

Seeing Alejandro make an unpleasant face, Oldart folded his arms.

"So you'll bring the dragoons into the palace's mess. Are you sure about that? Our dragoons... it is my humble opinion that their power shall only be exercised in defense."

If they were dragged in, they would have done something there was no taking back. Even so, Fina wasn't moved.

No, it didn't come out on her face, so it was impossible to tell what she was thinking.

"Three dragon riders have sided with Aileen. Did you happen to have three taking separate action? For instance... three who were to remain stationed in the remotest of regions?"

Oldart felt like clicking his tongue. He endured it to make a smile.

(Can't be part of the main force. So some folks sent off to the outskirts were lured in by promotions...)

"You have my apologies for that one. We'll have them caught and thrown in the dungeons in no—"

Fina wouldn't let Oldart finish.

"— The dungeons aren't kept open for dragoons alone. My sister shall go with them. As my personal request."

Fina told him her plan. Upon hearing it, Alejandro's face turned pale, while Oldart formed a stiff smile.

"Is this really the time for a family quarrel?"

Fina's reply came immediately.

"It's never too rare among royalty. Additionally, could I ask you to send reinforcements to my mast... Rudel-sama? As inconspicuous of a number as possible. Just a few elites, if you can."

Oldart had already been considering it.

"Are you fine with just a few?"

"If the numbers are too different, I fear it will be seen through. Both fronts of the empire's invasion plan likely have the potential to become their main force. We shouldn't divide our numbers too much. And... I'm sure master will be fine."

Fina said, established Oldart's cooperation and left. Oldart looked at the girl's back as,

"... The hell's up with master?"

In his head, Rudel had become even more incomprehensible.



After the dragoon brigade had taken flight. From the royal palace, an army of a few tens of thousands passed under the gate of the outer wall on their march.

Fritz set out in magnificent armor, and with so many people leaving the royal palace of the royal capital, it was far more scarcely populated than usual.

Aileen lowered herself into the throne in the audience chamber.

The knights and nobles around her recommended it.

"You're a perfect fit, Princess Aileen. No, Queen Aileen."

The nobles continued lifting her up with their words.

"But the empire sure is foolish."

"Surely. When there's no way they can win against a dragon."

"Even if they manage to take land, the dragons will take it back."

Their optimism lay in just how powerful the dragon's really were. As a matter of fact, they had protected the kingdom of Courtois like that for hundreds of years.

Aileen breathed a small sigh.

“It may be fine to reclaim it. But of the empire lays hand on fertile soil, perhaps they’ll calm down and stop instigating wars.”

Hearing that, the surrounding knights and nobles were a little flustered.

“No, Aileen-sama, I would never recommend leaving them be. It’s the empire we’re talking about here, if they get one victory, they’ll prepare to invade again —”

“Then we can simply talk the matter out. We do have vast spans of fertile earth. What have you to complain about?”

Her surroundings sent her troubled faces. But she had decided to lift Aileen up even so. From now on, they could make as many excuses to her as they pleased. So they thought.

In fact, it would surely be possible.

However—

“U-urgent message!”

A knight of the royal guard plunged into the audience chamber. The large doors were violently thrown open as he stood, out of breath in a huge panic.

“Princess Fina is—leading the defenders in a rebellion!”

A tension raced across the audience chamber. Aileen stood from her chair, covering her mouth with both hands.

“Fina did... there’s no way...”

The guard knights nearby her issued our orders.

“Suppress it at once. And don’t harm Princess Fina.”

They were the sole two heirs to the royal bloodline, with high utility value. The intent was to quell the rebellion at once, and have someone else take responsibility.

But Fina’s rebellion exceeded their anticipation.

“I-it’s impossible! The number of armed defenders exceeds five hundred. The

civilians are joining in to besiege the palace walls!”

As knight and noble alike opened their eyes wide, the vehement sounds of battle came from outside the castle.

“We request reinforcements at—”

As the messenger knight said that, one of the nobles wrung out his voice.

“Calm down. We have the dragoons we called from the—”

Recalling the existence of their trump card, the dragoons, the knights and nobles present regained their composure.

But the knight opened his mouth wide.

“Nay. They have them too... our three dragoons have already been taken in!”



Six dragoon knights had held down the dragoons on Aileen’s side.

Breaching the palace gate, Fina stepped in surrounded by knights of the tiger tribe.

Yet they stood without entering the door to the palace.

“Good on them to anticipate the enemy’s infiltration, but this sure is troublesome.”

Prepared long ago, the door unclear whether it could even move or not was closed. Aileen’s group had locked themselves into a siege, it seemed they intended to endure to the return of their dispatched troops.

It was not the palace of the historic Courtois Kingdom for nothing, its defense couldn’t be dealt with through ordinary means.

The high knight Sophina took command, while in the palace, the defenders continued the fight with the troops of Aileen’s faction.

“Hurry with the siege weapon!”

Aleist’s friends were also taking part, reassembling a siege weapon within the castle walls to use from the inside. But it wasn’t made in the first place to be used indoors.



“Not happening! In the first place, the halls are too narrow to carry it.”

The place was vast enough, but if they wanted to reuse the siege weapon they’d brought, they’d have to downscale it. That would lower its output.

If they took it too far, it might not do anything at all.

“You look exhausted. Should I have a dragon blow it away with breath from the outside?”

When Fina ran her mouth on that, she heard a voice from behind.

“Princess... no, Fina-sama, that would be quite troubling. To burn up the valuable material in the palace, and the many pieces of fine art will surely bring trouble down the line.”

When Fina turned, she made a terribly unpleasant face in her head.

(Dammit, they’re already here.)

There, Luecke’s father, Archduke Halbades led his own troop to make his way to her.

“You’ll be troubled when you take the throne, or perhaps become queen.”

Fina was expressionless to the Archduke... but quite irritated inside, she asked.

“Archduke Halbades. We are in a time of crisis. The fact you have appeared before me with such a statement means...”

The knights around Fina readied their weapon, stepping before Fina and the archduke. Not that Archduke Halbades seemed to mind.

“The Halbades House offers you our assistance. Fret not, with our cooperation, victory is assured. We will see to it that you are queen, be it consort or regnant.”

Fina expressionlessly had the knights around her back down.

“I’m counting on you, Archduke Halbades.”

(Dammit! Dammit! I wanted to suppress the palace already, greatly regulate the nobles and chip away at the power of these archdukes! If he plays a part, my reforms will...)

From inside the palace corridor came the sound of an enemy attack. It seemed they were attempting to destroy the siege weapon.

But a large glass pane in the corridor shattered, and as rugged knights and soldiers clambered in, a bloodbath was immediately raised among the enemy knights.

A red blood expanding across the corridor, the head of the Diade House, Archduke Diade made an appearance toting his prided war hammer.

When he placed it on the ground, it let off a heavy sound.

“Fina-sama! No need to fear, now that the Diade House is here.”

The hardy Archduke Diade proclaimed his alliance with a grand laugh. In her head, Fina burst into dry laughter.

“Aha, ahahahah... how did they get to the palace so fast!? It should have taken more time! This is strange. There’s something fishy here!”

At first, Fina intended to take a large bit of power from the other nobles, but two of the archduke houses had pledged their cooperation.

She thought they might watch and wait some, what’s more, it should have taken more time just to get their soldiers from their territories to the capital.

Fina’s plan was beginning to twist astray.

“... With great pleasure, I do accept the aid of Archduke Diade.”

When they arrived after all was over, Fina intended to give a sarcastic quip and move to reduce their power. Was he aware of that? Archduke Halbades sang praise of Fina.

“But splendidly done, Fina-sama. I’d almost have to assume you’ve been planning this for ages. For even the people of the capital to take your side.”

She had put Mii and the other demi-humans, along with a great many knights at the bottom of the totem pole up to spreading rumors. After the armies departed, she leaked a rumor a portion of the territories were to be abandoned.

Generally speaking, she made it out that the nobles were bad.

“On the way here, we received some considerably harsh looks from the people. Treating us almost as if we were the enemy. No, I wouldn’t dare to imply it was your doing, Fina-sama.”

With that cynicism from Archduke Diade, Fina internally broke into a cold sweat.

(... Dammit, I’ll have to revise my plan. But now victory is certain.)

Changing her train of thought, for not Fina prioritized winning against Aileen. But there was just one thing bothering her.

On Fina’s query, the two archdukes made slightly troubled faces. And Archduke Diade opened his mouth.

“Well, it’s that. I never thought I’d be riding a dragon at my age.”



The events of the capital.

They were events that happened a few days after Rudel’s arrival at the battlefield.

And—

“That’s enough. You’ve done enough, brother!”

A battered Rudel was trying to leave the fortress. He had fought for days, and after resting only a few hours, he would set out again. Rinse and repeat.

There weren’t any serious dents in his armor.

But Rudel’s stamina and mana had reached their limit. The one responsible for the fort, his younger brother Chlust had picked up on that.

“... Chlust.”

Rudel looked at Chlust, smiling a bit.

“No can do. This is my job. These are lines my superior told me, I took quite a liking to them. A job is how you live your life. I’ll fight to protect this point to the end.”

He was protecting those that lived in the area, taking refuge in the fort. But

they were also those who didn't abide by the evacuation orders.

"... Brother, you've done enough. Take the civilians with you and run."

Chlust hung his head, he clenched his fist.

"Chlust, you..."

Chlust made a face on the verge of tears.

"We'll hold out somehow or another. So... brother, please run. I already know. There's no meaning even if I live on. I'm a human who's already been abandoned. But brother, you're different."

Chlust spoke of just how important Rudel's existence was.

"Your power is necessary to rebuild to Arses House. It's hopeless for me. The same could be said for the country. Brother, you have to be there. You're... you're different from me."

Rudel looked at Chlust.

"I'm unable to abdicate this point. My orders are to protect this fort to my last breath."

Chlust smiled.

"I'll do it. I'll take care of it... brother, you just have to live."

There, Rudel returned a gentle smile.

"Chlust, you've... changed. You've changed so much since I saw you at the academy."

And Rudel punched Chlust out. Chlust was dumbstruck, as his consciousness faded away, he heard Rudel's voice.

"... But Chlust. This is my battle."



When Chlust opened his eyes, he was in the sky.

Sprawled out over a large, white back, when he looked around, he saw his subordinates.

"Brother!"

When he hurriedly sprung up, one of his subordinates, a knight looked at him apologetically.

“Captain... I’m sorry. Your brother, he,”

With a sorrowful roar from the dragon, Chlust looked back at the shrinking fort. The black monster army attacking to it, the unresisting fortress was being swallowed whole.

“... Why. Oh god why!!”

Chlust’s cry resounded through the sky.

## Chapter 153: Demon King

Standing at a high point of the fort, Rudel saw Sakuya off to the horizon.

Slicing up an ogre climbing up the wall towards him, he muttered.

“Live on, Chlust.”

Sakuya was loaded with the knights and soldiers of the fort, alongside the civilians that had taken refuge.

They were reluctant to leave Rudel’s side. But he forcefully used Sakuya to get them away.

Thanks to that, the fort was in the process of being destroyed. Monster scrambled up the outer wall, while wyverns circled the sky above.

As three wyverns headed for Sakuya, Rudel took a deep lurch forward followed by a large jump. Soaring into the sky, Rudel reached his left hand out towards the wyverns.

“How cold. Your opponent’s right over here... if you get that, have at me!”

Rudel emitted a number of lights around, he formed them into the shape of swords. Those swords of light with a golden glimmer began to spin on the spot.

Looking over his surroundings, Rudel sent his swords flying in all directions. To the wyverns chasing Sakuya, to the wyverns circling in the sky. To the monsters and the imperial army on land.

With a sword flying their way, the wyverns changed direction to avoid it.

“Oh no, you don’t.”

When Rudel clenched his left hand, the fired sword pursued its target and stuck in. Where it impaled, it exploded, and in the sky and on land, explosions rung out in all directions.

Falling towards the ground, Rudel avoided wyvern breath, and magic and arrows as he landed outside the grounds of the fort.

Around him, ogres taller than he could ever hope to be were armed at the

ready. An imperial knight who looked to be a commanding officer directed their right hand at Rudel.

“Fool! When dragged to the earth, a dragoon is no more than an ordinary knight! Surround him and beat him down!”

When the commander said that, the monsters assailed Rudel at once.

Readying his blade, and flowing mana into it, Rudel swung his sword one revolution.

“Wha!”

The surrounding ogres were blown back and bisected.

Holding swords of their own, the monsters who knew no fear—no, the monsters who would simply follow orders came at Rudel one after another.

Each and every one of them was laid to rest by the sword in Rudel’s right hand.

“Your words do me ill. Well, it’s true a dragoon is incomplete without his partner by his side.”

As Rudel said that with a smile, the enemy commander hopped on a horse and fled.

“Keep going at him! We have to bring him down while his dragon isn’t here!”

The fact the dragon protecting the fort-Sakuya- had left made the enemy lower their guard.

They had never even imagined Rudel would remain alone.

Rudel laughed before the foes approaching him from all sides.

“Sorry, but I don’t plan on letting the commanders get away.”

He said, disappearing from the spot with his wind magic-based movement. The surrounding monsters were carved up in an instant.

A spurt of blood whirling up in the air, at times the monsters lifted along with it.

The commander raised a scream.

“What is this? What the hell are you!!?”

The monsters were simply bodies to enact orders. In that case, targeting enemy commanders and having them target monsters on him was the simplest means to keep them here.

The commander exclaimed aloud at this strength exceeding his expectations. Right after, his body was split open by Rudel’s hand.



At the Gaia Empire’s main camp, Askewell confirmed the war situation with his adjutants.

His arms folded, Askewell gave a dry laugh.

“Hmm, so he persists even without his dragon. He used that fortress as a decoy to invite the enemy in... looks like things aren’t going my way.”

One of his adjutants, Mies offered Askewell some advice.

“Bahn Rhoshwas and Leor have already taken up their positions... should we call the back?”

Hearing those names, Askewell thought just a bit, before, “No, it’s fine,” he said and stood from his seat.

“He’s just as the rumors say... no, he goes beyond that. Courtois’ white knight. But how far can he go both outnumbered and overwhelmed?”

One of his adjutants shed a cold sweat.

“I can’t think he’s human like me. For the monster army we worked so hard to assemble to be lost this easily... Askewell-sama, should we not implore General Rhoshwas or Leor-dono to defeat the White Knight in good time?”

Askewell’s expression turned serious.

“That is unnecessary. We had far too many monsters—the plan was to reduce their numbers. These losses are all within expectations.”

Mies gave a slight nod to Askewell’s words.

(Right. Within expectations. Whatever the case, it’s impossible for the empire to maintain these numbers. If they’re not crushed here, even if we obtain fertile



soil, it will be meaningless.)

Maintaining this massive monster legion was an exceedingly large burden on the empire. They were an army assembled to be crushed from the get-go. If they weren't human, it wouldn't hurt anyone's heart.

(... But that white knight's doing a good job holding out.)

While it was within expectations, these losses were far too great to come from a single combatant. They had gone down considerably in only a few days.

However—

“No matter the damages, our main body's losses are insignificant. There is no problem.”

At Askewell's words, the adjutants nodded.

Right. Their main body of humans kept behind the monster legions.

What's more, it was an army that had suffered very little loss.

Askewell touched a hand to his chin.

“But it might just be time for Courtois' reinforcements to arrive. It wouldn't be bad to take the white knight's head before that.”

Mies tilted her head.

“Did we not have a deal with Courtois?”

Askewell laughed.

“If those things held up, we'd have world peace. Well, if they don't come, then that's no problem for us... keep sending monsters at him for a while. After that—I'll personally take his head.”

A warrior of the Gaia Empire and their hero, while the adjutants had some problems with Askewell's words, they agreed to them.

Mies thought.

(Well, I guess there's no way Askewell-sama will lose. Even with the white knight as his foe, he need simply tire him to the limit. It'll also raise morale.)



Just how many hundred, nay, how many thousands of monsters had he butchered?

Their movements were far too simple, too linear. When they all came at him, they were quicker to take down than when they targeted other people or the fort itself.

Rudel breathed roughly as he stuck the sword in his right hand into the ground, surveying his surroundings.

Monster corpses spread over and narrowed the ground, there were places where the bodies piled up. Trampling over those corpses more monsters came at him still.

His shoulders rising in breath, Rudel looked at the sky.

Hefty clouds interrupted the sun, and he had no idea what time it might be.

".. Looks like rain."

To receive the monsters coming at him, he forcibly stood his body and drew his sword from the ground.

"A dragoon with no partner is just a knight... huh."

Recalling the enemy commander's words, Rudel gave a self-deriding laugh. That was definitely no mistake.

He would have liked to fight with Sakuya.

But if the fort's knights and soldiers, and the evacuated civilians remained, he wouldn't be able to fight to the best of his abilities.

Perhaps he could have managed if he abandoned them... but if he did that, Rudel knew he would never be able to look everyone who saved him in the eye.

Moving his dulling body, he cut through enemies as he walked.

His movements without any unnecessary power, at this point, it was almost that the movements drilled into his body were arbitrarily coming out.

Without any waste, he slowly walked forward as he carved up his foes.

The commanders issuing orders to the monsters from behind fearfully looked at Rudel.

“M-monster—”

“There’s no way.”

“Just one person... the dragoons really are monsters.”

Hearing that, Rudel made a smile.

Seeing him laugh, the Gaia Empire Soldiers fears worsened.

“What’s wrong... quit cowering and come at me. Did you not come here for war? I’m sorry I’m on my own, but I, Rudel Arses shall be your enemy. I don’t intend to let a single one of you pass.”

On those words, the imperial knights driven by hears raised their warcries. In voices similar to shrieks, they ordered the monsters to charge.

“Get him!”

“Kill that man. You have to kill him!”

“Are the reinforcements here yet!?”

The number of enemies had decreased greatly from the onset.

An army that buried the entire landscape was now scarce and divided. It had decreased in density... that was simply the amount that Rudel had slain.

(Hopefully one last push.)

Forcing his body already a pain just to move, Rudel poised his sword and cut down all the monsters coming at him.

His form, despite the white armor he war was beginning to look like something else entirely.

The form of him gleefully defeating his foes had even brought upon knights fleeing from the battlefield.

It came at that moment—

“Any more will affect morale. Looks like I can’t overlook him any longer.”

A voice with a sense of presence boomed across the battlefield. Hearing that strong and reassuring voice, the cowering knights regained composure.

When Rudel looked in the direction of the voice, there was the disheartening sight of an enemy leading a host of troops. The numbers he had gone to great

lengths reducing were back to their original value.

The enemy looked at the ground, and he turned his gaze to Rudel.

“You’ve done well, to defeat so many. Allow me to give you my honest praise, white knight.”

Rudel leaned his sword on his shoulder.

“Call me dragoon, or White Dragoon. It’s a name a dear friend granted me. I’ve quite a liking for it.”

His gold hair swept back, the tall man in armor looked a little surprised before he gave a grand laugh.

“White Dragoon! I see, a white knight and a dragoon makes a White Dragoon. Makes perfect sense to me.”

A laughing enemy commander—

(His air’s different from the others. Is he a general?)

As Rudel raised his guard, his foe introduced himself.

“My name is Askewell Gaia, and I am in command of this army. White Dragoon... as I recall, you were called Rudel Arses, were you? I shall display your head to the armies of Courtois soon to arrive.”

When his smile went out, Askewell’s face was expressionless. Cold to no end, it spoke that he had no mercy to spare for Rudel.

On the contrary, Rudel laughed.

“And what of it? For two enemies, such is only natural. Of course, I do think a certain level of respect is required for an honorable warrior. I can’t say I like your means.”

Showing off enemy corpses wasn’t quite to Rudel’s liking.

Of course, he knew that was effective. In the sense of weakening an enemy’s fighting spirit, it was the proper action.

“... Honorable warriors, eh. On the battlefield, such nobility is meaningless.”

Rudel agreed with that point as well.

“You’re right. So I don’t plan to correct you. Once you take this head, you may do what you want with it. If you can, that is.”

To Rudel’s provocations, Askewell assumed they were his final show of courage; he didn’t seem all too moved.

“So you know no fear. What brute courage.”

“Brute courage? If I’m brute courage, then you are just a brute. Neither shame nor honor. A monster in human form.”

With a legion of monsters as the vanguard, they would go on a rampage on Courtois’ territory.

Perhaps he had something to think about Askewell’s means to lower their population, even using monsters as tools.

“... I’m sure you will never understand in your prosperity. Just how the empire pains, and how it hungers.”

Rudel had an inkling Askewell was trying to do something about the Empire’s present state of affairs. The reason they aimed for the Courtois Kingdom was that unlike the empire, the kingdom’s territory was abundant in fertile soil.

If they were living so destitute, with prosperous land nearby, of course they would want it.

“No matter how you despise me. No matter how you scorn me, there is something I must—”

Once Askewell had said that much, Rudel lowered his sword from his shoulders.

He stuck his glare on Askewell—the army behind him.

“Quit your yapping. You came to invade, didn’t you? Saying there’s something you have to do now, do you plan to go into penance? Are you trying to tell me, there’s this great reason you’re invading us so please forgive you?”

While Rudel’s words invoked anger from the imperial army—

“At the point you crossed the border, the war had begun. Cry your heart out in diplomacy if you want our sympathy... but this is already a battlefield. It is

only good manners for us to speak life and death with the weapons in our hands. Now... shall we kill one another?"

— At a smiling Rudel's atmosphere, everyone swallowed their breath.

Almost a vengeful spirit or a demon... no, he gave the air of a demon king.



Bennet boarded Izumi, Aleist and his harem members on the back of her own dragon Heleene, setting out for the battlefield.

"We're almost there. But to be honest, with these numbers, you can't quite call us reinforcements."

While she was a dragoon who protected Courtois, one rider and ten-odd ground combatants were cause for unease.

Izumi cast down a pensive countenance.

"... Even so, if we make it, we may be of the slightest assistance."

Bennet nodded.

"Well, the situation is considerably terrible, but I'm sure Captain Oldart will send reinforcements. And if the Archduke Houses are moving, as long as we can hold out—"

Aleist's cry cut her off.

"Bennet-san! Ahead!"

Ahead of them, a giant, white dragon—Sakuya flew with a large load of people on to her back.

Izumi stood.

"Sakuya!"

Surely Rudel was with her. She knew it had to be true, but Sakuya was acting strangely. Bennet looked at the people riding Sakuya's back—

(Apart from knights and soldiers, civilians too? Don't tell me they were late to get away?)

There, Sakuya mournfully roared. Hearing her voice, Izumi covered her mouth

with both hands.

“That can’t be...”

“W-what’s wrong? You can hear her, right? What happened!?”

Dragons could communicate telepathically with those they had conceded their hearts to. For that reason, there was a high probability Izumi could hear Sakuya’s voice.

Meaning it was possible for her to learn what was going on at the border.

Bennet heard Sakuya’s tale through way of Heleene.

‘This is bad. Looks like that Rudel remained at the fort alone. He had Sakuya carry those late to flee to get them to safety.’

Bennet’s expression warped.

“That fool!”

But to Rudel who couldn’t run away, this was surely the only way to let the others survive.

“There should have been a smarter way to do it.”

Bennet muttered, and inferring from those words and the situation, Aleist’s complexion turned pale.

“... Rudel.”

## Chapter 154: Last Boss

Another battlefield.

There a separate detachment of the Gaia Empire—their supposed main body was locked in a staring contest with the Dragoon Brigade.

The first to arrive at the battlefield, Oldart's dragoons flew to intimidate the unmoving enemy near the border.

If that had them step down, it would be the end, but the enemy was evidently acting strange.

Skirmishes had broken out between the two powers many a time, and they were sure to know just how powerful their dragons were. Yet the army didn't seem the least bit disconcerted.

What's more—

"They're waiting for something."

As Oldart looked at the enemy camp and muttered, one of his subordinates approached.

"Captain, they show no signs of moving. They're considerably calm."

The Gaia Empire had invaded on two fronts.

There could be no doubt their main force was the army led by the crown prince before their eyes, but Oldart couldn't help but be curious about the movements of the other prince's army.

"Including Rudel, they have three riders. I think they can hold out..."

Even an army of ten thousand, to a dragoon, was no great threat.

A war could end simply through breath attacks from the sky. At times dragon slayers, and people outside the norm could appear to take them down. But with multiple riders, the possibility of them being taken out drastically fell.

"I've got a bad feeling about this. Perhaps I was right to send reinforcements."

Oldart touched his prided well-kept beard as he muttered; his subordinate's



expression turned grim.

“Captain, wouldn’t we be better off crossing the border first to meet them? There is no need for us to keep such a number stationed here—”

His subordinate prompting him to send half, even a third of his forces, Oldart lightly raised a hand to stop him from saying any further.

The reason was the dragon descending from the sky.

A gray dragon—not under the dragoons’ jurisdiction, the dragon of the royal guard.

“Now that wouldn’t do. Their other force is few in numbers. The enemy’s main body is here. It wouldn’t do for you to take arbitrary action.”

The gray dragon landed before Oldart’s subordinate. Fritz dismounted from its back and came out before Oldart.

“Why if it isn’t the supreme commander. Well, just try and understand the thoughts of someone who cares for his comrade in arms. So anyway, why have you ridden to the battlefield alone?”

What about the army? When Oldart asked, Fritz shrugged his shoulders.

Atop the back of a dragon, my speed far outweighs their march. I wanted to get a prior view of the battlefield.

Oldart was beset by a tiredness. No, rather than tired, a part of him understood how he felt.

(When you’re riding a dragon, a normal march feels like a snail’s pace... but the supreme commander leaving his army is a big no-no.)

Perhaps his subordinate felt the same, he made a conflicted expression as he looked at Fritz.

(It’s the same whether he’s there or not? Well, he’s the princess’ favorite, after all.)

He surely didn’t have a place even among his own troops.

As Oldart thought, he looked at the immobile imperials right across the border.



Meanwhile—

The army led by Askewell had suffered large losses from but a single man.

Even if that had been taken into account, the figures were too large to have come from opposing one unit.

“Have the monsters stand down. Surround him with elites.”

By Askewell’s orders, knights in uniform full-body armor came out front.

Their footing nimble despite the solid armor over their bodies, they were undoubtedly elites.

Askewell led them to surround Rudel in order to prepare a stage for one-on-one combat.

“White Dragoon, was it. You are strong. Far too strong. That is why... I must personally take you on.”

After picking up his spear and dismounting his horse, he walked over to Rudel.

While Rudel was covered in mud, dead-exhausted, even so, his fighting spirit didn’t wither before Askewell.

A sword in his right hand.

A shield in his left.

The knight in white armor fought Askewell’s army on his lonesome self.

It was not his intent to show his respect.

(I’ll beat you down here. For the morale of the entire army.)

After tiring him out so, Askewell would defeat his tattered opponent in one-on-one combat. He knew they couldn’t be called a virtue of the battlefield, but such notions were irrelevant to him.

If he didn’t win this battle, the empire had no future.

What’s more, he couldn’t let Rudel continue to put out casualties. If it came out that one man had taken down several thousands, it would influence morale. Crushing him with numbers would do little to remedy the situation, but

if Askewell were to go out and defeat this dragoon, he would be able to completely turn the situation around.

(It would normally be a poor move, but...)

Rudel had stuck fast far harder than anticipated, forcing Askewell to change his objectives a number of times.

When Askewell readied his spear, Rudel's mouth curled into a grin.

(So he laughs in this situation.)

There were at times, those who sought beauty on the battlefield. One on one combat and personal sacrifice—Askewell was unable to understand them.

At his core, he was someone who set out to be a research, not of a nature to look up to war heroes.

(Is he the sort that seeks his place to be on the battlefield?)

Seeing Askewell's stance, Rudel opened his mouth.

"You... are strong. However!"

Rudel instantly closed the distance with a cut; Askewell turned aside his strike with his spear.

Receiving, parrying, he warded off Rudel's attacks.

He had to be worn out, seeing the crudeness sticking out in Rudel's attacks, Askewell was convinced.

(He's close to his limit.)

A large step in, Askewell thrust his spear, and Rudel stopped the attack with his left-hand shield. He tried to divert the face, but it seemed he was unable.

"I'll show you my respect for remaining to fight on your own. I will parade your corpse, but I will erect a monument."

Rudel didn't seem particularly interested.

"Don't go erecting monuments in someone else's country. Do you think you've won?"

— The match was practically decided already.

As he was about to say that, Rudel slammed Askewell's spear hard into the ground.

The impact lifted the dirt, and as it flew through the air, Rudel took distance—

“You're not getting away!”

When Askewell tried to give chase, Rudel fired off water magic towards the ground. With the moistened earth making it easier to slip, Askewell stopped moving for only a brief moment.

Confirming that, Rudel disappeared from before his eyes.

No, it was as if a gale had broken out with Rudel at the center, he began moving at a tremendous speed.

“W-what are—”

Looking around, Askewell opened his eyes wide.

There a scene of the elites surrounding them being cut down in a moment of distraction unfolded before his eyes.

Askewell regained a strong grip of his spear, turned to Rudel and yelled.

“Your opponent is over here!”

Rudel glanced at him and spoke.

“Wrong. Each and every one of you is my opponent.”



Rudel held up his sword as he looked at Askewell.

(But this guy is strong. Each individual blow is strangely heavy.)

The man coming at him, in comparison, didn't fall short of Rudel in either power or speed. A blessed constitution.

Askewell's talent and mana capacity might even exceed his own.

However—

“You fight way too cleanly.”

Lifting dirt with his foot, he kicked it straight at Askewell's face. While he

immediately reacted and avoided it, his movements were unaccustomed.

He had rarely fought against an equal. Or perhaps too many of his fights had been against monsters, and in battles against humans, his blessed talent would end the match far too soon.

To an extent, he looked inexperienced when it came to fighting foes of close strength.

(But perhaps that just means that's simply how talented he was.)

Askewell swiped his spear to the side.

That attack wrapped in the mud on the ground to assail Rudel. What was just a physical attack became a shockwave to come at him.

Springing over it to avoid, Rudel cut down at him from above. Askewell held his spear horizontally to catch the blow.

That powerful strike sunk the third prince's boots into the ground.

(I can't just push through as I am now.)

As he thought that, Rudel's body let off a faint light. Symbols surfaced over his form, covering his entire body to protect him.

Unleashing the power of the white knight, Rudel took a look around.

(Looks like cutting down the elites has set the others in motion.)

Panicking at Rudel's change, the surroundings moved to protect Askewell. Those surroundings were blown back by a bolt of light from Rudel.

"Bastard!"

While Askewell glared at Rudel, from Rudel's point of view, he had no recollection of accepting a one-on-one duel. More so, whilst surrounded by enemies, there was no dishonor to be had in launching an attack.

To add to that, Rudel had noticed Askewell's ulterior motive.

(I see, so his aim is to defeat me and raise morale. That's surprisingly earnest. Is that how far they've been cornered?) If they kept pushing him back with numbers, Rudel thought he could cut them down, and inflict enough damage that the enemy would retreat when reinforcements came.

“What’s wrong? If you don’t stop me, your men will die.”

When he provoked with a smile, Askewell forcefully swung his spear to knock Rudel back. Purposely flying back, Rudel opened more distance and attacked his surroundings once more.

The imperial army launched magic and arrows at him; but as Askewell was right by him, those attacks were few and far between.

(Should I use him as a shield to lower their numbers?)

As he considered it, Askewell fired off his strongest thrust at him. That blow like an arrow shot from afar looked to be difficult to fend off.

Due to his sheer force, the foothold Askewell kicked sent dirt several meters into the air.

Holding out his left hand, Rudel stationed several dozens of shields of light in the path of his advance. With enough force to pierce through all of them, Askewell’s momentum was only decreased by the slightest amount.

But that slight was enough. For at the end of his charge through dozens of shield—Rudel was long gone.

As Askewell hurriedly stopped in his tracks, Rudel circled around to his left—and bashed Askewell with his shield.

“Dammit! If I could circle right...”

That would have settled the match, but enemy soldiers had gathered there, and there was a chance his timing would be off.

He regretted not swinging his sword from an impossible angle.

(I need some more training. It’s a severe blow that I didn’t take him out with that attack.)

He tried to pursue Askewell, blown back, rolling along the ground, but enemies gathered around him.

They were surely trying to protect him.

While he did have some thoughts on their devotion—

“This is the war you started—”

Rudel cut down any soldier that would stand between himself and Askewell.



Askewell's head was hazy.

(What just...)

When he raised his head, the backs of his men were directed at him, and beyond them a fountain of blood. His head was heavy.

Rudel had smacked him in the head, and the sounds of the battlefield sounded somewhat distant.

“W-what are you doing. Stop. You have to pull back!”

His subordinates died before his eyes. That was something Askewell couldn't bear.

While he would kill his foes, he was too soft on his allies.

As he tried to stand to his feet, he thought he heard a single clear voice.

‘... When I've put so much in your favor, you can't even properly fulfill your role?’

Hearing that disappointed voice, Askewell looked around. Time seemed to flow by ever so slowly.

(What's happening—)

‘That's enough.’

Upon that irritated voice, he saw the ground at his feet suddenly overflowing with a pitch-black mud.

(What? This is...)

He tried to run, but his body wouldn't move.

Yet as the black mud swallowed him down, a sense of delight—he could tell his strength was coming back to him.

Enveloped in a relief that made him want to entrust it his body, he could sense the wariness he had held towards Rudel a moment before was relaxing.

(Aah, this is...)

Askewell was swallowed by the mud, and when it came unstuck, there he was, his entire body covered in a dark ominous armor stuck-fast to his being.

No, rather than armor, perhaps it was closer to skin.

When his form had practically become that of the devil, Askewell looked at Rudel. Within that slowly moving time, Rudel's eyes were trailed on him.

(... So he noticed. But it's too late.)

The surrounding time returned to normal, and when the sounds came back vividly, Askewell swiftly approached Rudel and kicked him.

Blown away, Rudel collided where his army of allies was stationed, dragging in the surroundings as he rose a cloud of dust.

His subordinates took in Askewell's form in bewilderment.

"Askewell-sama..."

"That form is..."

"What could have?"

Seeing his perplexed subordinates, Askewell didn't think anything in particular. Walking straight and tall, he held up his right hand a bit.

A black something escaped from his hand, that something was a spear.

Pulling that uncanny black spear from his body, Askewell walked towards Rudel, slowly breaking into a dash.

It was as if he was verifying the movements of his body, and without seeing his men before him as a hindrance, he simply blew them away in his wake.

From the person he had been a moment ago, something fundamental had changed.

"Now, here is your real battle."

Askewell closed in on Rudel. An unsightly smile spread across his face.



## Chapter 155: Dragon and Wyvern

As the demonized Askewell blew him away, Rudel cut the inside of his mouth. Dripping blood, he looked at the beast making towards him as he stood.

“Now this is troublesome.”

He was blown away to where imperial soldiers were in close formation.

For that reason, the impact knocked soldiers off their feet, and around him, the troops had surrounded him to prevent him from escaping, but... he could tell from their faces they were confused at Askewell's transformation.

Shaking off his own subordinate's restraints, he smacked them aside.

“As far as I can tell, he's conscious.”

Looking into Askewell's eyes, apart from malice towards Rudel, it looked like there was some sort of consciousness within them.

“I'll find out if I give it a go.”

Taking his stance, he cut at Askewell.

Unlike before, Askewell violently swung his spear to knock Rudel's sword aside.

Determining that even with the strength of the white knight he would lose in a battle of pure force, Rudel circled around behind him.

He could circle in the blink of an eye. It was easy enough for him to take Askewell's back, but...

“This is—”

He heard the sound of metal colliding.

Rudel had definitely lowered his sword at the point he'd aimed for. The nape of his neck.

Immediately jumping back, he avoided Askewell's lance that came with the same motion as he turned face. The impact brought casualties to the soldiers around him.

That hardened-skin-like armor was almost like metal. Yet be that as it may, it didn't look like it was obstructing his movements.

Askewell looked at Rudel, lackadaisically opening his mouth.

"Is that all you've got? In that case, it won't be long before I kill you and continue the march. With this power, it won't just be this region. We can cut deep into the Kingdom of Courtois. We might make it all the way to the capital."

He would continue the march, he would make all the way to the capital, Askewell said and laughed.

(He's incapable of rational decision making, I see.)

As Rudel laid down a verdict, Askewell took a stance with his spear.

"Where did all that vigor go, dragoon!"

Kicking the ground, Askewell closed in on him.

Rudel fired a light bolt in his direction. While it met him head on and exploded, it had no visible effect on Askewell's assault.

"If even magic is ineffective, this is going to be troublesome."

While he was exhibiting the white knight's power, Rudel was being overpowered. Against a foe whose power was now on another plane, Rudel worked his head on means to counteract.

(Now then, I can't leave him to his own devices, but...)

But some part of him thought back to his student days. He had started out fighting Aleist, at the time a foe on another plane, and had pushed himself in some crazy ways.

(... Compared to that, I don't have it too bad right now.)

And now, the things he was capable of had increased.

With Askewell coming right at him, Rudel closed his eyes. He undid his stance, and without putting up any resistance, the point of Askewell's spear was encroaching on his face.

"Given up!?"

There was just a bit of anger in Askewell's voice. Perhaps he was disappointed in Rudel for giving up having come so far. But Rudel snapped his eyes open.

"Sorry but... I never did know when to give up."

When he opened his eyes, his blue iris had turned red. He was using his magic eyes.

Rudel's armor from the black boar.

Rudel's eyes from the mad bird.

They had left them to him to fight against destiny.

Feeling the time around him pass slowly, Rudel avoided the spear point by a hair's breadth, let go of his weapon, grabbed the spear, and used it as a lever to throw Askewell.

He had used the prince's momentum.

Thrown off of his feet, Askewell slammed into the ground. But he was immediately up.

Rudel's sword and shield were now stuck in the ground. He confronted Askewell barehanded.

"Are you mocking me?"

Askewell must have felt belittled. Casting down one's weapon in this situation was out of the question.

Yet Rudel was serious.

"I'm always serious. This way was simply the optimum method to win against you."

Rudel smiled.

"I need to train more. There are too many techniques I can't use with a weapon. But hey, if you think you're being belittled, then I must apologize for that."

Seriously coming to defeat Askewell, Rudel wasn't making light of anyone. Thought how Askewell saw it was a separate issue.

“If that isn’t mocking, then—”

Right after, Rudel manifested before Askewell’s eyes.

His fist lifted, Rudel swiftly lowered it towards him.

Askewell, making light of Rudel’s attack—

“Guhah!”

— Was sent sprawling a long way through the air.

Rudel looked at Askewell blown away, waving his right hand a bit.

“That’s hard. Well, not too hard to get through.”

Askewell brushed a hand against his smacked face. There were no external wounds. In the first place, by demonizing, it became hard to put a dent in his skin.

It was a separate issue if the force could penetrate inside of it.

“W-what did you do?”

Rudel gripped his fist towards Askewell, whose mouth dripped with blood.

“I penetrated the force.”

After only those words, Askewell’s spear was ready to attack Rudel. He stepped in and lowered it from up high.

His speed—it was a blow that was lowered in the time an average fighter would have taken to raise it up. That inconceivable power and speed, a normal person wouldn’t even be able to comprehend they had died if they took it on.

Avoiding the attack, Rudel let his eyes glow red as he laughed.

“Too slow!”

A left straight with his weight behind it sunk into Askewell’s body, the impact passing through his pack and piercing him through.

Askewell spat up blood.

“Guh, damn you!!”

Seeing him lose his composure, Rudel felt just a little disappointed.

“If that’s all it takes, you were stronger before.”

Watching him recklessly swing around his power, Rudel kicked him away.

A deep breath, Rudel took a stance as Askewell stood and tried swinging his spear—

“I told you... too slow.”

— In the next instant, Rudel grabbed Askewell’s face with his right hand and slammed him into the ground. Right after.

“It’s over.”

With those words, a large shockwave broke out with Askewell at the center. The ground caved in to form a crater.

The surrounding imperial soldiers were blown away, Askewell showed the whites of his eyes.

Rudel sluggishly stood.

To put an end to the immobile Askewell—to take his head, he approached, when he felt something was off.



Meanwhile.

The army Fritz led as supreme commander was half on the verge of collapse.

“What are the dragoons doing!?”

“An army of wyvern in the sky—”

“The enemy number surpass three hundred riders—”

The imperial army started up as soon as their own army arrived. It was all going right by the planned scenario. But the imperial army that moved had established their wyvern unit as a countermeasure to the dragoons.

Three hundred knights mounting wyverns, a battle unfolded in the sky above.

Looking to the sky, they were outnumbered and overwhelmed.

Subordinates rushed to Fritz one after the next to report and seek orders.

“The empire’s army has crossed the border and begun hostilities with our

forces! But their numbers are higher. We need reinforcements—”

“More than that, we should pull back. The empire boasts three times our land troops!”

Even if they sought reinforcements, there were no reserves to send around.

Having depended on their dragoons, the Kingdom of Courtois couldn’t reach the empire in ground troops. What’s more, on a quality side as well, the empire surpassed Courtois.

Their weapons tempered under the torment of dragons.

They had now turned to torment the knights and soldiers of Courtois.

Fritz was dismayed by this unanticipated situation.

From the very start, he was a decoration of a commander. And yet, for them to seek so much from him now, there was little he could do about it.

Those around watched him with chastising eyes.

“I-immediately request reinf—”

He tried to give an order for reinforcements, but his subordinate denied it.

“Where do you seen the leisure for that!?”

Not even with a grasp of the army’s state of affairs, Fritz didn’t fully understand how many units were stationed where.

(Why... what could have happened?)

Fritz clenched his fist, and the words of the next messenger who surged into the tent turned his face pale.

“U-urgent report! Princess Fina has raised a rebellion at the capital! Both Archduke Diade and Archduke Halbades have turned hostile, and Princess Aileen has been placed in a terrible predicament.”

It wasn’t just the battlefield, there was chaos at the palace as well, causing many of those gathered to lose their complexion.

Those here were those who sided with Aileen.

If Aileen were to be overthrown—

“Retreat. Rush to the aid of the palace at once, and subjugate the rebel for—”  
“How can we retreat with an enemy before us!? In their pursuit, our army will fall to ruin!”

If they continued the fight with the empire, their prospects of victory looked slim.

But if they didn’t return to the capital, their standings would be in danger.

Within all of that, Frit sprinted out of the tent.

He raced over to his own dragon.

(Aileen!)

He acted out of worry for Aileen. If he hurried, he hoped he could make it in time.



Oldart issued orders to his men in the air.

“We can take them on one to three. Just do that and we win.”

The wind dragon flying beside him—Alejandro riding on its back was fed-up.

Avoiding the wyvern breath firing all around him, he yelled at Oldart.

“I don’t care about that. Give some actual precise orders!”

A laughing Oldart continued moving his formation to draw the wyverns further from the ground as he looked at the armies below.

“Well, here should be good.”

If the two armies clashed below, the dragoons wouldn’t be able to fight without reserve. If nothing else, they wouldn’t be able to aim any breath attacks down.

Any accidental shots at allied forces, and the dragoons would be blamed.

“Well then, ladies and gentlemen—how about we teach these imperial knights just how difficult fights in the air can be? Risking our lives to do it.”

Following that with a ferocious smile, the dragoons’ movements changed.

The dragons that had been flying on the run turned face to go on an offense.

Alejandro raised the speed of his wind dragon, circling around a wyvern, and having his dragon crunch its neck.

Oldart's gray dragon turned to face three encroaching wyverns, continuing to fly backward as it peppered them with flames to drop them one after the next.

Pulling his own weapon, Oldart jumped to switch over to the wyvern that had come right below them.

The imperial knight riding it was surprised by his sudden visitor.

"Royal scum!"

While the knight drew his blade, he didn't seem very accustomed to combat in the air.

"You're going weak at the knees. How do you expect to swing a weapon like that?"

He kicked the enemy knight off, the knight raised a scream as he fell. The wyvern began flailing as Oldart stabbed his sword into its back.

After leaping off the wyvern and taking distance, his own dragon came to collect him.

Their high coordination surprised the empire's wyvern unit. And one after another, the wyverns fell to the ground.

"Real sorry. We've got several hundred years of knowhow stacked up. We're not soft enough to lose to some sudden upstart pans—what?"

Rising his gray dragon's back, Oldart looked around.

The wyverns began to dissipate into a black smoke and disappear, the fog flying off to somewhere far away. It was rising from the ground as well.

The monsters they'd led with them turned to smoke and headed off somewhere.

The empire's knights abandoned in the air fell straight down; Oldart promptly recovered one of them.

"Oy, what just happened?"

Grabbing the knight's weapon and tossing it away, he pressed a knife to their



neck to draw information.

“I-I don’t know! We were never told any—”

The knight made truly fearful eyes. Oldart clicked his tongue.

(You can’t lie if you were never told to start with. The direction of the smoke is... don’t tell me, it’s where Rudel is?)

The smoke was flowing to another battlefield.

Upon discerning that, Oldart had a terrible premonition. Alejandro rushed over to him.

“Oldart! The supreme commander up and left. The ground troops are taking to their heels and fleeing!”

Oldart looked at the ground.

Courtois’ army on the run. The disappearance of the wyvern unit had prompted the imperial army to prepare to flee as well.

“... Retreat. We’ll leave fifty riders, and the rest of us are chasing that smoke.”

Oldart looked at the black smoke drawing a single straight line in the sky as he spoke.

## Chapter 156: What's Gone and Done

On the back of a gray dragon, a lone rider made for the capital.

“Hurry...go faster!”

A gray dragon could move hundreds of kilometer in the air, but to Fritz, it felt far too slow.

Even now, Aileen's life could be in danger. When the thought struck him, he wished to save her, pure had honest.

At first, he thought he was lucky. Being liked by the princess and receiving preferential treatment, from captain of the royal guard to supreme commander...

But now, Fritz would throw it all away to go save Aileen.

“I see it!”

The view of the capital from the sky.

Smoke was rising from the palace in the center of the large city. Even seen from afar, it was clear something had gone awry.

“I have to hurry and—”

The dragon flew to the palace for Fritz' sake. On one of the verandas of the palace, there was a cornered Aileen.

Around here were those who saw to her everyday, and knights who were only good for appearance's sake. They wouldn't be of any use at all.

Flames had broken out in various parts of the building, it seemed the battles still raged on.

“Aileen!”

Fritz approached the palace.

Looking up at him, Aileen smiled.

“Fritz-sama!”

But cruel as could be, it was then that enemies flowed into the room where she hid. The defenders and the personal army of an archduke house broke through the royal guard, and the knights of Aileen's faction to flood in.

The knights and servants by her side were immediately apprehended.

"Kuh! Do it!"

To save Aileen, Fritz ordered his dragon to breath fire. But the gray dragon shook its head to the side. It wasn't that it had ignored Fritz' orders.

If it fired its breath, Aileen would be drawn into its midst.

Before Fritz' eyes, Aileen was taken in.

The enemy used her as a shield, they seemed to be well aware he wouldn't be able to attack.

"Cowards!"

Just as Fritz drew his sword and was about to jump down, the rebel army led by Fina made its appearance. Protected by the high knights around her, Fina expressionlessly looked up at the sky.

Aileen turned to Fina and cried out.

"Why have you done this—Fina! I... I was only trying to make Courtois a better country."

Fina wouldn't turn to face her. The high knights around readied their shields to solidify Fina's defenses.

"Fina-sama, please step back!"

"The enemy is a dragon!"

"Keep Princess Aileen close!"

Fina brushed off their advice to go out onto the balcony. She stared straight at Fritz.

"Why did you hoist insurrection at such an important time!?"

Receiving his anger, Fina opened her mouth.

"It's precisely because it's this time. Just as you want to save my sister, I want to save my master— Rudel-dono. But if I left you people to your own devices,

even if Rudel-dono returned, you'd devise some reason to have him executed, wouldn't you?"

As she plainly stated, "That's why I raised a rebellion," as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, Fritz was at a loss for words.

"... You're mad. You rebelled for that reason alone!?"

Fina lightly spread out her arms, and expressionlessly, she advised Fritz to surrender.

"I don't think you're one to talk. Well, so be it. Now turn yourself in. Do so now, and you can still be decapitated as a noble knight."

Perhaps that was compassion to Fina, but to Fritz, there was no way he could accept it.

"Don't mock me!"

Fina lowered a hand.

"I see. That is a shame."

Holding her right hand up, Fina snapped her fingers.

Aileen looked beyond Fritz, to the skies even higher and cried out.

"Fritz-sama, run!"

When Fritz looked up, there were six dragoons closing in on him. His gray dragon arbitrarily withdrew from the spot.

"W-wait! I still have to save—"

As Fritz was pulled away from the balcony, Aileen looked at him with an expression of despair. Fritz reached out his right hand.

"Aileen..."

He powerlessly muttered.



As Fritz made off to the distance, three dragoons chased after.

Fina saw them off before returning from the balcony to the room.

Sophina beside her wiped her sweat.

“That was way too reckless, no matter how you look at it.”

Sophina candidly chastised her thoughtless conduct. Upon hearing that, Fina answered expressionless and indifferent.

“You’re right. I’m sorry, Sophina.”

“I see you’re not repenting in the slightest.”

She hadn’t known her a long time for nothing, Sophina read Fina’s emotions.

“Well, at least the dragon had some sense to spare, and I knew they wouldn’t attack if we used my sister as a shield. The dragon Fritz rides is a gentle one, after all.”

There were individual differences among dragons.

The one Fritz rode was comparatively gentle, and a good dragon that would listen to the orders of its partner knight.

Fritz was afforded a dragon that was easy to handle, so that went without saying.

“A dragon’s breath could have easily eradicated two princesses.”

There, Fina uninterestedly brushed her hair aside.

“Even so, I wanted to try it. Otherwise, Fritz would—”

Aileen restrained by the knights yelled at Fina.

“Fina! Do you understand what it is you’ve done!? And what do you think you’re doing to Fritz-sama?”

Fina turned back to Aileen.

“... If he was taken in there, he would have his head cut off. I meant precisely what I said. Or would you prefer he be tortured and executed as a heinous criminal?”

Aileen crumbled at the knees.

“T-torture...”

As Fina looked at Aileen, the archdukes Halbades and Diade entered the

room.

“If it isn’t Fina-sama, it looks like you’ve managed to accomplish your objective.”

To the two shamelessly approaching, Fina breathed a sigh inside.

(Their timing is impeccable... well whatever.)

They had surely come to confirm Aileen’s safety. Perhaps they needed a proper check if they wanted her to take responsibility at the gallows.

As Fina walked off, the archdukes walked side by side with her.

“Now then, how do you intend to deal with Aileen-sama?”

To Archduke Diade’s question, after thinking a bit.

“... Officially, she’ll be executed. After that, confinement. If we don’t know if I can have kids yet, we’ll need some insurance, won’t we?”

Archduke Halbades nodded. He seemed just a little delighted.

He seemed happy Fina could make a proper judgment as royalty. No, perhaps because there was a spare, he was happy to know Fina would always have a replacement.

(If I’m too stupid, these bastards will pull a fast one, and if I act too smart they’ll come to kill me. Good grief, this is why I wanted to chip away their power.)

If Aileen was killed, Fina would be the only direct descendant of Courtois. In that case, while Fina’s own safety was assured, in the case she didn’t have children, an archduke would be next in line to be enthroned.

In the case of Aileen’s prolonged survival—if Fina used the power of the state against the archdukes, there was a possibility they’d raise Aileen up and have a rebellion of their own.

As to what she wanted to say... no matter which way the ball rolled, Fina was in a harsh situation.

(I’ll have to be wary either way. Aaah, this is why I wanted to end it before these guys could arrive.)

Like that, upon confirming her victory at the palace, Fina quickly entered preparations to send reinforcements.

“... Now then, I’ve secured a place for you to come back to, master.”

A small mutter and Fina had immediately gotten to work.



In the sky, Fritz hit the dragon’s back again and again.

“Why did you run!? Get back there at once! Go back!”

Fritz cried and pounded his fist, but it was clear even if he remained, he wouldn’t have been able to save Aileen.

Even so, he wanted someone to blame so badly, he couldn’t help himself.

This wasn’t his fault. He needed to know it wasn’t his fault.

“... I.”

Before he realized it, he had deserted under enemy fire, while his last ray of hope Aileen had already been taken in and lost her authority.

As one who had a dragon, the dragoons would be in a mad frenzy to find him. And what awaited him when he was taken in...

“Haha, ahahahah... dammit! What an insignificant life! Come so far... after coming so far.”

All that awaited was despair. Run as he may, there was nowhere to go. As he considered defecting to the empire, a black fog had begun to gather around him.

“W-what’s this!?”

As Fritz looked around, the gray dragon roared.

Before him, a winged giant—a Gora was being formed.

A four-armed giant bald only on the head, it was far larger than a gray dragon. The gora’s fist smacked into the dragon, slamming it and Fritz onto the ground.

(What is it now...)

Fritz’ consciousness grew distant.



(H-huh... I'm alive?)

When Fritz opened his eyes, before them was the form of a gray dragon, its wings plucked off, its body bleeding all over.

Seeing the back of the terribly wounded gray dragon, Fritz lifted his body.

“W-what just...”

Beyond the dragon, a gora with a hole in its chest, collapsed to its knees.

“Did you do it?”

Fritz couldn't believe his own partner had fought that brutal monster and come out on top. The likes of a gray dragon compared to a wild dragon, it was clearly inferior.

Comparing it to Rudel's dragon, he even saw it as shoddy. And yet, that dragon had fought, its life on the line to protect its partner Fritz.

“You... why!?”

It fought to protect an unconscious Fritz, and now afflicted with a fatal blow, it didn't look like it could rise or fly any longer.

Blood flowed from his mouth.

‘... I am a dragon born of the Kingdom of Courtois. One of the first of my kind.’

The dragon that had never conversed with him before was suddenly making a speech.

‘I was raised with love. But my brothers are already all gone. While some died to illness, a great many fell in battle.’

Fritz stroked the gray dragon. He had always found her unsympathetic, he had never tried speaking from his side. For that reason, he didn't know the first thing about his own partner dragon.

“Then why did you save the likes of me? If you submitted me to them—”

‘I have my own pride. As a dragon... the pride to protect my partner. I've lost my partner knights too many times. Each time I would feel regret. Among them,



there were terrible knights. But a majority of them treated me as a partner. They treated me dearly. That's why I swore to protect them, no matter what sort of partner they may be.'

When Frit was about to say something, the Dragon gave her last words—

'... Let me say one last things. You should look around a bit more. It might be too late, but... you have the talent.'

After one final deep deep breath, the dragon collapsed and died.

When Frit' tears began to flow, this time, the gora's mouth moved.

'How dare a lowly gray dragon... but you are no longer necessary. It's all going as planned...'

The mouth of the dead gora moved, causing Frit to draw his sword. Upon seeing its blade, the gora's eyes narrowed.

'That is not your weapon. And I'm already done with you. It's time for the stand-in to leave the stage. Your place has already been prepared...'

The gora dissipated into black fog and swallowed Fritz up.

"S-stop it! I still—"

The black fog swallowed Fritz, leaving some parting words, it faded away.

"It's all according to plan. To deliver the sword to Aleist someday..."



When he came to, the black fog-swallowed Fritz was sitting in the middle of a wasteland.

"... Eh?"

His enemy gora was gone, the husk of his partner nowhere to be found. The place looked a bit different from where he had been before.

In his confusion, Fritz stood, and caught sight of a group on the move. A gathering of merchants and travelers, but it seemed they were being attacked by monsters.

"What's with that group?"

But seeing the members, Fritz felt something off. They were wearing equipment of quite an old style, and the way they fought was peculiar.

He couldn't stand and watch.

With that on his mind, Fritz drew his sword and helped out the caravan.

— After that.

The group of horse-drawn wagons offered him a lift, and it was then he learned his words wouldn't get through. The towns and villages they led him to seemed somewhat off from what he knew.

He felt almost as if he had been flown off to another world.

Left with nothing but a borrowed sword and the clothes on his back, Fritz would spend the rest of his life finding a place for himself in this strange new world.



Years later.

On Rudel's battlefield, a peculiar scene unfolded.

"Well damn."

Before the eyes of Rudel as he gave a troubled laugh, Askewell had been taken in by black fog, and assimilated with a Gora to stand before him.

But that wasn't what bothered him.

Perhaps it could be called ironic... right above the gora, consisting of black and red lines, a sinister dragon beat its large spread wings.

The reason Rudel was so troubled lay in that the black fog had gathered, and changed into a dragon.

The dragon looked down over him.

'This is where you disappear.'

Come this far, Rudel never thought he'd be facing off against a dragon. He smiled a bit.

"Good grief, someone up there must like messing with me..."

The fated foe of one who sought to be a dragoon, at the end would face Rudel in the form of a dragon.

## Chapter 157: Events Set in Stone

In Courtois' palace, the knights and nobles who had lost the flag known as Aileen, and a great many soldiers who took part were apprehended.

A portion of the palace had burned up and the walls were crumbling, but with no time to consider repair costs, Fina led Sophina and her pieces-the defenders-to meet with her mother and father.

Albach lay on the bed. He seemed somewhat relieved the ruckus in the palace had died down. But when he heard of Aileen, his expression clouded over.

In place of Alback, whose voice still wouldn't come out, Ciel inquired Fina.

"Fina, I recognize your ability in putting a stop to Aileen's reckless actions. The truth stands that you managed so much while we were unable to do anything. You may become the next queen, regnant or consort, and do whatever you may. However, in regards to Aileen."

Her mother Ciel worried about Aileen as well.

Fina gave a slight nod.

"Understood. However, she will officially be treated as dead. That is the most I am capable of."

She enacted an insurrection while the empire was invading. Aileen would henceforth be treated as dead.

"That is plenty. Also, about the war situation—"

Even if they possessed dragoons, if the palace was in shambles, perhaps something terrible was happening on the battlefield.

As Ciel thought so, Fina breathed a sigh within.

(Sister went and dispatched my troops, so I have no forces to send around to master. Albeit I heard Archduke Halbades and Diade sent out reinforcements.)

Fina wouldn't impart Ciel with any wishful thinking. She simply expressed the truth.

“The situation is still being verified.”

A wrinkle graced the queen’s brow.

“That’s a disgrace. Even if you win here, if territory is lost, you’ll be the next one up for the executioner’s block.”

But Ciel couldn’t really blame Fina for it. She had, in essence, been shoved by her daughter into house arrest.

Fina turned to Ciel and gave a curtsey.

“I have already taken measures, so no need to worry. Now about what’s to come—”

The confusion in the palace would be cleaned up by Fina.

(Alright, I’ve made a place for master to return, so what’s left is the battlefield.)



“What is... this...”

“General Liquorice, what in god’s name is this?”

Mies Liquorice— Askewell’s adjutant, and a girl who’s name was placed in the position of second in command looked at the scene on the battlefield at a loss for words.

The strengthened black monsters she’s prepared, dead or alive, dissipated into smoke and gathered at two points.

The first was at Askewell, who’d been defeated by the white knight.

The rest gathered in the sky and took on the form of a dragon.

The Gora Askewell had prepared as a dragoon countermeasure to decide the battle.

A giant, four-armed, hideous monster. Its enhanced form sprouted wings, so it could even fly through the sky.

But on the white dragon’s departure, it suffered a large injury and was sent to the backlines.

Taking in such a giant, Askewell has sunk up to his chest in the gora's forehead. All that could be seen was his drooping silhouette.

"I don't know. This isn't... what I..."

From the start, there were too many unnatural points. The monster controlled greeted such success it even made her fearful. And establishing an army of enhanced monsters.

It was a monster army that had been crafted up without any decent research, but even Mies never thought it could do something like this.

Her subordinate, a knight sought confirmation.

"Should we call back the generals?"

The self-proclaimed archmage Leor was preparing a magic circle, so he couldn't move.

Bahn Rhoshwas said he wasn't interested and led his army separate from the main battalion.

Mies wanted to hold her head.

Leor was someone who fixated on preparing his own personal magic circle, and only fighting on top of it. If the enemy did stray over, his magic would most likely blow them away. He could probably even take on a dragoon.

But he couldn't move.

Bahn had a distaste for surrounding a single man with a massive army, and showed no signs of moving. No, he might move if he noticed this abnormal state of affairs...

"Send a messenger at—"

As Mies was about to move, a dragon roared overhead.

When she looked to the sky, the white knight had set out his shields and swords of light, leaping up to face it.

"What even is he!?"

Seeing Rudel stand to face the fiendish-looking dragon, Mies cried out with teary eyes.



‘I see. So that is your answer.’

Facing the thorny, sinister dragon, Rudel fired a round of magic. The reason he took on the sky battle was because Askewell wasn’t moving.

Embedded into the giant’s forehead, he was still slumped down without a twitch.

Therefore, he decided the dragon was a higher priority.

The dragon narrowed its eyes as it took on Rudel’s magic. Yet no matter how he fired, it showed no visible effect.

“Don’t go arbitrarily closing the curtains. I definitely did mull a bit... but you are my enemy, aren’t you?”

While Rudel did love dragons, that didn’t mean he was kind enough to concede his life to one.

More than that—

“But I myself do hold a special loathing for such underhanded means.”

He glared at the dragon.

The black smoke had gathered to defeat Rudel and took the form of a dragon. That was something Rudel couldn’t forgive.

‘I see. But this is your end. It must be your end. That is the conclusion of the ‘story’, and your fate.’

The sinister dragon—the vile serpent spread its large wings, the atmosphere trembling under its roar. The vibrations alone sent Rudel sprawling, crashing him into the ground.

Quickly getting up, he wiped his mouth.

“That’s just from the roar. And I’m not even scratching it...”

While inside, he did want to ride it just a little bit, Rudel gripped his weapon.

‘You shouldn’t keep your eyes on me. The one who will kill you is—’

Rudel lowered his eyes a bit. He had no choice but to.

For there was the form of a black giant, raising tremors in the earth as it made its way for him.

Aiming at Askewell in its foreheads, he didn't hesitate to form and shoot swords of light.

While they hit directly and exploded, the thought of stopping seemed foreign to this four-armed being.

"This... will be harsh."

Approaching his limit, Rudel murmured to himself, before him a dragon in the air, a gora on the earth.

"... Is this my fate?"

With a small mutter, and a small laugh.

"But not bad. If anything's to best me, it better be ramped up this high..."

For a moment, Rudel recalled Sakuya when she had her human form.

The words Sakuya spoke to him.

"When I'm going to be the strongest dragoon, if I stood down here, she'd laugh at me."

With overwhelming despair laid out ahead, Rudel slowly took one step forward.

He walked, gradually raising his speed to face the Gora. While it was massive, its balance looked to be precarious, so much balancing on two feet.

"Alright, let's start with the ankles."

Despite being in the worst situation, Rudel tried searching out the optimum hand. However, the dragon in the air gave a large flap of its wings to obstruct him.

With winds sweeping over him making it difficult to move, Rudel infiltrated the space around the gora's feet, and cut his sword into its ankle.

The giant's skin was too thick, a normal cut didn't seem like it would reach the tendon.



“In that case!”

Magic sword. Light dwelled in his blade as mana formed a sword edge around it, its length growing to a few dozen meters. And one spin.

The gora’s leg was severed.

“Start with this guy—!”

Rudel jumped back with great haste as a breath attack was fired from above that would wrap the gora in too. He managed to avoid.

But the vile serpent in the air didn’t seem perturbed.

The ground gouged out, amidst the blazing inferno—the gora that had finished regenerating its leg stood.

He heard the serpent’s voice from the sky.

‘Struggle, stand. All that awaits you is death.’

Rudel, upon hearing that, readied his weapon with a smile.

“Bring it on.”



Bennet’s partner, the water dragon Heleene.

Riding on her back, Izumi and Aleist’s party reunited with Sakuya along the way. After lowering the evacuees and entrusting them to Chlust, they made for the battlefield at full speed.

Bennet felt the air tremble from Heleene’s back.

“What’s this feeling...”

As Bennet felt an unpleasant presence, Heleene was the same.

‘Right. This detestable feeling. How should I put it, it’s pissing me off.’

Leaving Heleene’s remark aside, Bennet knew the battlefield was close, and ordered everyone to prepare for battle.

“We’re nearing the battle. Is everyone ready?”

Izumi nodded; Aleist had put on his black army, he was ready to go.

“I’m fine.”

“All good here. But is Heath okay?”

Gripped in Heleene’s forepaw, Aleist’s trusted steed that was being carried with them. Bennet heard Heath’s condition from Heleene and passed it on to Aleist.

“No problem. You’ve got yourself quite a fine horse. He’s rearing to start running the moment his legs hit the ground.”

Aleist felt relieved. His harem members were finished preparing as well.

But as Bennet faced forward, her expression turned a little bitter.

(The enemy is supposed to have prepared troops in the tens of thousands. In such a battlefield, Rudel alone. What’s more, we his reinforcements number so few.)

The probability of Rudel’s survival, and the damages wrought to their war potential by sending in so small numbers.

With a situation far too harsh before her, Bennet braced herself.

(A battlefield so drastic is a first for me.)

And the field came into view.

“... What’s that?”

The battlefield she saw had its surroundings blown away, the ground was showing its skin as not an army, but a black dragon hovered over the barren land.

On the earth, a large giant swung its four arms and opened its large mouth.

But as a radiant light emitted, three of its arms were lopped off and sent flying.

“It’s Rudel!”

— He was alive.

Upon confirming it so, Izumi cried out, while Aleist made a fist with his right hand in a triumphant pose. Bennet was also relieved, but...

The sinister dragon roared, while the giant's open mouth emitted hundreds, thousands of needle-like somethings.

The intense sounds of battle that had rung up to that point could no longer be heard.

Behind Heleene, Sakuya who was desperately following roared. It was almost as if she was crying out. When Bennet looked at Izumi, she had collapsed to her knees.

"... So we didn't make it."

Those words from Bennet sent Aleist into a shock.

"N-no way. But there's still a chance he's alive!"

He might just be injured. That was surely what he wanted to say, but from Sakuya and Izumi's state, Bennet understood the prospects were grim.

"A dragon has a good understanding of the state of their partner dragoon. Unfortunately... we're now on a battle of vengeance. Worst case scenario, we retrieve Rudel's corpse and pull out."

At her cold tone, Aleist grabbed her shoulders.

"H-how can you—!"

Say something so cruel, Aleist wanted to say. But Bennet knew how corpses were treated on the battlefield.

At the very least, wanting to make out with his body was still a show of compassion.

"We'll land soon. If he's alive, you might hear his last words. You and Izumi hurry to Rudel."

Bennet produced an iron boomerang from a bag fastened to Heleen and held it in her hand.

As Heleene neared the battlefield, she fired a breath at the dragon.

While there seemed to be safe troops on both flanks of the imperial army's battle array, the army in the center was in shambles.

While it did look bizarre, it also looked obvious they wouldn't be able to

approach the dragon and giant rampaging in the center so easily.

“Those blasted imperials prepared something crazy.”

A black dragon and giant.

It wasn't only Heleene who thought they were the work of the empire. Once Aleist parted from Bennet, he cast down his eyes and drew his swords.

(He must've done a toll, that Rudel.)

Knowing her subordinate had fought splendidly, Bennet strengthened the hand gripping her weapon. She continued testing out the black dragon by blasting breathes at it.

“We're here.”

On the battlefield, imperial soldiers were gathering around Rudel.

Wedging numerous boomerangs in the space between her fingers, Bennet threw them in quick succession.

Heleene flew right up next to the ground to make it easier for everyone to disembark.

And the scene that came into sight was one of Rudel, his chest pierced through by a long spear-like projectile.

“Everyone get down.”

Heleene lowered Heath onto the ground, While Izumi and Aleist's party jumped off her back one after the next.

What Bennet saw the moment after she jumped was the form of Sakuya punching at the giant.

## Chapter 158: The End of the Event

Rudel looked at his own chest.

His white armor slathered in mud, he had incurred various injuries of all shapes and sizes. They were the proof he had managed to stand firm.

But now he was pierced by a black, twisted polearm.

Thousands of similar rods were stabbed into ground all around him, almost like a jail cell to lock him away.

He tried blowing away the rain of black spears from the sky. He had managed to parry a few of them...

“... Is this the limit?”

He let go of the sword in his right hand. Sewn onto the ground, his back arched back, Rudel spat up blood from his mouth.

A single stab to the heart.

A fatal blow.

“He’s got me. I can’t move anymore.”

Looking down on him was the gora, he’d severed three arms from a moment prior. The arms were gradually regenerating, and now it looked down over an immobile Rudel.

The vile serpent was the same.

As if to say their role was over, now they did nothing but stare down at him.

He heard footsteps.

Knights and soldiers of the empire.

While they were wary of the dragon and gora, as the two were no longer moving, they tried to approach. Of course, that was out of hatred of Rudel.

Having brought about such large-scale losses, they walked over to Rudel who had produced this current state of affairs.

“You crazy bastard.”

“Coward of Courtois.”

“How dare you, my brother...”

Comrades and relatives. Those who had them killed by Rudel’s hand took weapons in theirs to close in on him.

Their movements didn’t seem as if they were being led; they were moving on their own.

Rudel laughed.

“Did I crush the chain of command?”

It would be nice if that made them retreat, he thought as he looked at the sky.

The sky was clouded, the sort of weather to bring one down. The vile serpent flapping its wings in such a sky seemed to have already lost interest in him.

It gave off an air as if it was satisfied with this result.

“... Sakuya really is number one.”

Looking at the dark dragon beating its wings, Rudel closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

He heard the imperials soldiers flocking with weapons in hand.

“Did I... manage to resist?”

Rudel didn’t know who his words were directed to. Perhaps it was Sakuya, perhaps his dear friends. The superiors and colleagues he trusted—and, Izumi’s face came to mind.

With a roar, a breath was fired at the vile serpent.

The winds growing rough, the sound of two large masses colliding opened his eyes.

There was Sakuya.

Swinging her two large arms, she punched at the Gora. Witnessing her in all her glory, Rudel gave a small laugh... as the power drained from his body.



Jumping down from Heleene's back, Izumi drew her katana the moment her feet touched the ground.

Bennet threw her projectiles one after the next to clear away the knights and soldiers approaching Rudel.

In order to reach Rudel, Izumi ignored her foes and plunged straight forward.

As she ran cutting down the large, black bars pierced into the ground, she spotted Rudel, his chest pierced through by one of them.

"Rudel!"

Izumi cried, cutting down all the black bars around him in her advance. The gathered imperial army soldiers directed their weapons towards her.

"Cowards of the kingdom!"

They were removing spears to make their way to Rudel, they numbered a few hundred.

Before such an enemy, Izumi narrowed her eyes.

"You're in the way."

A single flash of her sword. Firing a slash, she mowed down black spears and cut down a few enemy soldiers, all while Aleist, whose shadow slipped through the gaps in the bars blew his foe away bars and all.

"Rudel!"

The two raced to Rudel in great haste; by the time they reached him, he had already breathed his last breath.

Izumi immediately severed the spear pierced into him, unpinning him from the spot.

"W-we have to heal him at once—"

Her hand shaking in her fluster, Izumi got to healing Rudel. There, out of boomerangs, a dagger in each hand, Bennet raced over.

"What are you doing? Pick him up and run."

A glance at the sky, Bennet looked at the gathering imperial soldiers and readied her daggers.

“Even Heleene can’t win against that one. And that one doesn’t seem up to it anymore—”

Confirming Rudel’s death, the black gora and dragon had lost their motivation. However, as the two bodies—looked at Aleist running towards Rudel, they roared.

“W-what!?”

The Imperials were confused as well.

Seeing there were even some who took to their heels, Bennet clicked her tongue.

“So they can’t control it.”

Izumi held Rudel tight. She was shedding tears.

“Major Bennet. Rudel has no pulse... and. And, I can’t feel anything from him.”

Izumi’s shaking voice.

Aleist looked at Rudel in a daze. Unhanding the twin swords he gripped, he stood stock still on the spot.

“You two, get a grip on—”

There, one of Aleist’s harem members rushed over and informed them.

“This is bad, guys! The stationary armies on both flanks are now coming towards us.”

Hearing the armies that had ignored the main body up to that point were now moving, Bennet looked to the sky. There was the form of a serpent treating her partner Heleene’s attacks as if they were nothing at all.

But looking down over them, it was taking a stance for battle.

Izumi held Rudel to her chest.

“This, this can’t...”



He had been put to battle alone under such a hopeless situation, Izumi embraced him as all manner of thoughts passed through her head.

The gora Sakuya was fighting was also strong. To Izumi, it looked as if Sakuya was losing in raw power. Rudel had fought such a foe all alone.

Bennet made her resolve.

“I’ll take up the rear guard. All troops, immediately pull out—”

Aleist picked up his weapons and screamed.

“Don’t screw with me... don’t screw with meeeee!!”

Aleist kicked the ground to propel himself towards the Gora. A sword in each hand, he cut with all his might.

A black mana resided in his blade, it flicked and bent like flames as it grew to swallow the Gora down.

When Sakuya leapt out of the way, an attack with all Aleist’s might poured down on the beast.

An impact great enough to enrapture the surroundings in a sudden gale rung out as smoke hung over all.

Aleist raised his shoulders in breath. Looking at his back, Izumi.

“Aleist, you...”

His shoulders rose, his shoulders fell, soon it was turning into a slight quiver.

“Don’t screw with me. He’s a precious friend. Give him back. You damn—”

But a flap from the dragon and the smoke had cleared.

There stood a gora, burnt on the surface. But new skin soon generated from below that, and the black carbonized flesh fell off in pieces to return it to its unharmed state.

He heard a voice from the Gora.

But it didn’t come from its mouth. He could hear it from the mouth of Askewell, buried in its forehead.

‘I’ve waited so long for this moment.’

Izumi had stood, and shouldering Rudel, she perked her ears to this ominous voice.

Aleist looked a little flustered.

‘It was all for today, for this very moment... and for you to die.’

The one the gora and dragon glared at with the word ‘you’ was undoubtedly Aleist.

“W-what do you mean?”

Izumi looked at Aleist. But Aleist seemed somewhat accepting of this declaration.



Aleist felt as if his heart was being clutched by the voice he heard from the gora.

‘I was born for the very sake of your existence. That was the reason for us to exist... but a reason like that can eat shit.’

The gora pointed at Aleist, the dragon opened its mouth as well.

‘At first, it was a truly minuscule distortion. It all started more than fifteen years ago. When you, in your ignorance, called a dragon to your manor out of pure curiosity.’

Sakuya landed on the ground, and stood to protect Izumi and Aleist. Heleene kept a careful watch on the dragon’s movements.

While the imperial soldiers were running, they would immediately reform their forces and advance on them.

“Back then? Don’t tell me, when I said I wanted to see a dragon on my birthday...”

When Aleist recalled were memories of the day he pleaded to his parents to see a dragon.

This was a world of swords and magic. It was quite inevitable he wished to witness a fantasy. Yet such a meaningless action from Aleist had set it all in motion

‘That small distortion gradually grew in size. That was Rudel. It’s your fault that whelp set out to be a dragoon.’

Aleist turned to look at Rudel being held up by Izumi.

Everyone looked at Aleist.

The dragon continued.

‘We were born in order to correct that distortion. Do you know why? That is because you wished for it.’

That manner of speech almost as if Aleist was related to the monsters before their eyes; Izumi’s expression darkened a bit.

Aleist shook his head.

“Even if that’s true! You killed Rudel!”

The gora indifferently spoke.

‘That’s right. But had you done nothing, that’s where it would end. You are the source of it all. We prepared the stage for you, set up every event, so this final day could come.’

The vile serpent opened its large mouth.

Mana turned to beads of light gathering in its mouth to a sinister black and red hue.

‘The very last event, you can’t imagine how we’ve waited... all that’s left is to erase you, and it will all be over. We may finally be at peace.’

Aleist brandished his weapon.

But the ground and the sky—what’s more, a foe even Rudel couldn’t match before them, the result was laid out from the start.

In addition, Aleist’s head was occupied with thoughts of regret.

(Is it because I wished for it? Because I wished to live in a game world that this—if I just disappeared...)

The regret of the reincarnator Aleist.

His dear friend had died for the world he had wished for, and he would die to

it as well.

(Is this the result of reincarnation?)

He thought he had obtained everything. But what he really wanted could never be obtained with cheats.

(How stupid was I.)

Aleist was beginning to give up.

(I finally got what I really wanted. Yet I'm going to die in a place like this?)

The gora, it's four large arms held aloft, and a vile serpent about to fire a breath from the sky.

With these two bodies before him, Aleist grew desperate and raced forward.

"Like hell I am!!"

Aleist cried.

But his voice was immediately covered by the sound of explosions.

Sakuya stooped over to protect Izumi, and Heleene took her distance.

What rained down on the gora and dragon was tens, hundred of magics and breaths.

"Wai, gyaaaaah!!"

Aleist cried out in a different sense, bracing his body as the wind and smoke swept over him. Surviving the attacks that didn't take him into account by diving into his shadow, once he could no longer hear the explosions, he protruded out his face.

"W-what just...

Looking over his surroundings and racing his head, there were several hundred dragons flying through the sky.

A rider could be seen on the central existence, a single water dragon.

And before that water dragon, a red dragon and wind dragon followed close. They were equipped with bags, and it was clear the two by its side were the partners of dragoons.

However, riding the water dragon's back was...

"Eh Why!?"

Aleist leapt from his shadow in surprise at the young girl with a spear, whose side ponytail swayed in the wind—the form of Rudel's little sister.

"The hero is always late to the party... but maybe a little too late this time."

Looking up at Lena, who said that with a laugh, Aleist was dumbfounded by the legion of wild dragons before him.



Atop the sky.

Riding on Mystith's head, Lena looked at Rudel being shouldered by Izumi on the ground.

"Brother..."

'We didn't make it.'

Lena's ponytail swept sideways as she turned her eyes to the gora and dragon before her eyes.

"No, not yet. My brother won't end in a place like this. He's a man I recognized, after all."

Mystith laughed.

'Very well. If that got you down, I'd be beating that black thing to bits by now.'

To Mystith's side were Cattleya and Lilim. Mystith had grabbed them when they were rushing over as reinforcements.

Cattleya took a glance at Lena.

"Why is she boldly standing in the center?"

Lilim was just as confused.

"Rather, she hasn't even enrolled in the Academy, yet she's contracted to Mystith... was the Arses House actually amazing?"

The two looked at the ground.

“Even so, this is already...”

Both Cattleya and Lilim’s expressions turned dark as they inferred Rudel had spent his life supporting the front lines. Thereupon, the vile serpent before their eyes emerged unscathed from the smoke that broke out in their attacks.

‘Another distortion? I shall erase you too. Along with Aleist—’

Lena leaned her spear against her shoulder.

“Oh shut it, you. In short... he pisses you off, so you want to take him down, right? Well I’m the same. I want to tear apart whoever did my brother in.”

Mystith gave an irritated roar.

‘Hey, you, yeah you, blacky! You act like hot stuff for a newborn brat!’

The dragons roared out one after another, obeying their current leader Mystith.

The serpent narrowed its eyes.

‘Accursed lizards. Let me teach you what a real Dragon is. Gora, you erase Aleist.’

Cattleya and Lilim prepared for battle.

“Rather, I really don’t want to fight someone who got out unscathed from so many attacks.”

Perhaps Lilim was the same, as she breathed a sigh.

“Right. I don’t see us winning this one.”

Mystith smacked her right fist into the flat of her left hand, speaking in a low voice.

‘That’s simple. We surround it, gang up, and beat the living daylights out of it. It’s got to pay the toll for calling us lizards.’

Lena seemed just as irritated.

“Ah, how irksome. Me and broski love dragons and all. Well, put all the troublesome stuff aside... and you’re dead.”

Wyverns bubbled up from the serpent’s body. Their sinister forms resembled

the serpent.

Even bigger, and more menacing than the enhanced wyverns. They came out one after another.

Lena smiled.

“Bring it on.”

Cattleya and Lilim, upon looking at Lena.

“This kid’s definitely Rudel’s sister.”

“You’re right. I can really see the resemblance.”

In the sky, a dragon dogfight was about to commence.

## Chapter 159: Thank you for Everything

In the sky above, an aerial battle of dragon and wyvern unfolded.

Within that, Sakuya fought the gora to help out Izumi's retreat.

The party fled across the battlefield-turned wasteland. No one around knew the right words to call to Aleist. By the enemy's words, Aleist had been the cause of all of this.

(I shouldn't take it at face value, but—)

Izumi thought, yet still ended up raising her guard to the silent Aleist. Whether he noticed her attitude or not, Aleist wouldn't open his mouth.

At times, the breath of a wyvern or dragon would pour down and raise an explosion. Heleene flew to protect the fleeing members, and once they had distanced themselves from the battle, Millia appeared before them.

She had brought allies.

While they were too few in numbers to call reinforcements, it was a reassuring addition.

With a large wave of her hands, Millia faced them and called out.

"Over here!"

Upon crossing a low knoll, they came upon soldiers warily watching the battle between the Gora and Sakuya.

Millia had her fellow demi-human soldiers prepare a station for them. However, upon seeing Rudel's state, she made a terribly frightened face.

"L-lay him down over there. We'll get to treating him—"

But Bennet was quick to inform her.

"That won't be needed. His heart's been pierced. It's fatal."

To a Rudel who was already no longer breathing, Millia desperately held in her tears.

"You idiot. It's because you faithfully honored such ridiculous orders. The



palace could have managed just fine.”

Upon hearing that, Izumi sought confirmation.

Her hand stroked Rudel, lain over a stretcher.

“Is the palace alright?”

Millia wiped her tears before explaining in a shaking voice.

“Princess Fina used the defenders to suppress the insurrection. The archduke houses helped out too... and yet, why is this guy dead?”

At the end of her sights, Rudel, his eyes closed with a slight smile on his face.

Izumi strongly clenched Rudel’s hand. Seeing Millia’s tears only made Rudel’s death seem all the more real.

“Always bringing us nothing but trouble. Yet in the end of the end, for such a meaning—”

Meaningless, Izumi was about to say, when Bennet plainly interrupted.

“There was a meaning. Rudel held out here alone, he made a literal last stand until the allied army could arrive. Don’t say it was meaningless.”

It was then that two groups made for Rudel.

Luecke and Eunius, who had only just arrived. The dragons appeared and helped transport their forces, hastening their arrival.

“Move aside.”

Luecke pushed his way through knights and soldiers to arrive at Rudel, opening his eyes wide when he came upon the man laid out.

Eunnius was the same, albeit, he had come clearing a path far more roughly.

And looking at Rudel, he spoke.

“... Damn fool. Going off and dying.”

A terrible monologue. But his tone was terribly disappointed and horribly dark. Eunius yanked out the black bar wedged in his heart.

Luecke instantly hung his hands over Rudel’s chest. He was going to use healing magic.

Aleist opened his mouth.

“Luecke, Rudel is already...”

Luecke, the man who looked the most level-headed of the bunch, glared at Aleist and screamed.

“Shut your mouth. When it comes to magic, I’m better than anyone. Better than you, and better than Rudel. I’m number one. So you... hold your tongue.”

It was impossible for healing magic to revive the dead. No matter how many spells he used, the deceased body showed no reaction.

Izumi wanted to get a word in for Luecke to stop, but upon seeing his face, she shut her mouth.

“There’s no such thing as impossible for me. A dear friend or two... who would I be if I couldn’t help them out? I’m Luecke Halbades. I’m better at magic than anyone...”

Shedding tears before Rudel, he desperately continued to cast his magic. Those hands were beginning to burn from the heat of magic overuse.

Eunius grabbed his arm, forcefully wrenching him from Rudel.

“That’s enough! Don’t waste your mana here.”

Luecke cried back.

“Waste? You just called it a waste!? I see. In the end, that’s all Rudel was to you...”

When Luecke saw Eunius face, he couldn’t say anymore. Eunius was crying too.

“Listen here. Neither you nor I can bring back someone who’s died. But you know, isn’t there still something we can do? Fight to avenge him. Those imperial bastards are still here. Then it’s obvious what we’ve got to do!”

On those words, Luecke made a fist with his scalded palms. His subordinate Vargas held in tears, as he ordered those around him to heal him.

Izumi touched a hand to his cheek.

“Rudel, look how many people you’ve made cry... and yet, you’re the only one

smiling. You really are a terrible guy.”

There, Aleist exclaimed.

“I-I’ve got it. Rudel can still make it, I think...”



Rudel was in a white, a very white space.

Hazily taking in his surroundings, the words that came out—

“This is the second time I’ve come here. The first was when I parted with Sakuya, perhaps?”

— As he calmly weighed his situation, a cracking sound came from the fist lowered on his head.

There was Sakuya—the former goddess Sakuya, floating in the air in human form. Tears welled in her eyes, her cheeks were puffed up and her face was red.

‘Rudel, you idiot! Idiot, idiot, huge idiot!’

Before the girl who continued smacking both hands into him, Rudel laughed.

“So you came to get me? Guess that means I really am dead.”

Sakuya’s crumbled into tears.

‘How many times did I tell you!? You have to fight together! And yet, why did you leave your own partner? We worked so hard so we could fight together!’

Seeing Sakuya cry, Rudel dimly perceived this was the afterworld.

“Sorry. I tried my best... but it looks like I failed.”

He had lost to fate. While Rudel thought so, he didn’t make a regretful face.

‘Why do you look so refreshed!? Everyone’s crying for you!’

Rudel sent her a bit of a sorrowful smile.

“I won’t say I have no regrets. I fought to triumph over some fate or another. And I’m only half the dragoon I want to be. I hate that I couldn’t use the chance that you gave me. But you know... I fought with my all. I exerted myself so hard that even looking back, I am certain I couldn’t have done better.”

If he lost on top of that, there was no space for excuses.

Rudel said so and stroked Sakuya. Despite the nostalgia he felt, it also brought to mind his own partner dragon.

Sakuya looked at Rudel with a serious face.

‘Are you satisfied now?’

To that question, Rudel—

“Satisfied? I’m not. I am definitely not satisfied. I wanted to ride a dragon’s back through the sky some more. I haven’t even become the strongest dragoon. My seniors are strong, see. I won once, but I’m still so far from my ideal/”

‘In that case, try looking a bit irritated.’

“You sure are stupid. I’ll never be satisfied with myself no matter how far I go. Even if I overcame, to die when the years caught up, I’d never achieve satisfaction”

(But that’s fine. Either way, I fought hard enough to think so—)

To Rudel’s words, Sakuya floating in the air breathed a big sigh. She scratched up her blonde hair and touched her left hand to her hip.

‘There’s a possibility of you coming back, but if you’re already satisfied, then —’

“Really!”

The moment he heard of a possibility, Rudel snatched Sakuya out of the air.

‘Hey! Up to a moment ago, you were all like, I’m not satisfied, but perhaps that’s fine!’

“Fool. If I can live, then of course I’m going to live. I’ve only just become a dragoon. I haven’t turned those imperials back. There’s a mountain of stuff left to do.”

As Rudel shook her up, Sakuya’s eyes spun as she forced her way out of his grip and unsteadily teetered into the air.

‘I’m just bringing up a possibility! And, and it’ll need Aleist’s cooperation.’

Rudel tilted his head.

“Aleist’s cooperation?”

Sakuya nodded.

‘That guy has the exchange stone, doesn’t he?’

Exchange stone. It was what Aleist received while carrying out a mission in the Celestia Kingdom.

“Now that you mention it.”

He always had it on him, so Rudel did remember.

‘If that idiot notices, it might work out. But the probability is low. And there’s no telling what he’ll have to give up. Though honestly, he’d be a fool if he didn’t keep it with him.’

Hearing of what would be lost, Rudel asked Sakuya.

“What will Aleist lose?”

Sakuya took her time explaining to him what had happened hitherto. It was the truth of this world, and about Aleist’s existence.



“I-I’ll save Rudel. I can still make it.”

His body clad in black armor, Aleist pulled off his helmet and produced a blue stone from his breast. It was the exchange stone.

Seeing it, Izumi recalled its purpose and turned to Aleist with a shake of her head.

“You can’t. If you use that, there’s no telling what you’ll pay in exchange for Rudel’s life.”

Hearing Izumi’s words, the surrounding faces looked at Aleist. A great many looked on with conflicted faces, But Aleist’s harem members grasped him.

They stared at him sorrowfully.

“Aleist-sama.”

As a representative, Seli tried to stop him.

(There are people who want Rudel to live more than me, but there are some who would choose me too. That's a bit reassuring.)

The gora's revelation had raised everyone's wariness towards him by no small amount. So if he said he would exchange his life, he worried they would happily tell him to do it.

Eunius approached Aleist and grasped his shoulder.

"Give it a rest. You think Rudel would be happy with that? You shut up and fight the empire."

Those words were his own way of worrying for Aleist. Luecke was the same.

"You're the worst, to even bring up choosing one or the other. Aleist, think a bit more before you speak."

Aleist gave a bitter smile.

(Choosing one or the other, huh. Originally, the protagonist was supposed to pick either Eunius or Luecke, but... well, that's not important.)

Aleist removed Eunius' hand and reassured him it would work.

"Don't worry I do have something I can give. It's not my life, and it's borrowed goods, but it'll be enough, I think."

Eunius grimaced at those words.

"So you can't state it definitively to the end. But you should quit while you're ahead with those gambles. The result won't make anyone happy. Rudel is dead. You are alive. That's the result."

Right, Rudel had died.

(The event was definitely carried out. And those guys said they would kill me. Which means what happens here on has nothing to do with the game.)

Aleist approached a lying Rudel and had Izumi concede her spot.

His eyes abruptly met with Millia. Milla's eyes were red and swollen.

(She really does like Rudel, doesn't she. But I'll be granting her wish too.)

However, Millia to Aleist.

“You’re really not going to die, right? And does that stone have that much power? If you both end up dead...”

Both ending up dead was the worst case.

(Ah, she’s worried about me too. How delightful.)

But Aleist had no conviction he could do it.

(It’s not like I never thought about what would happen If this day came. There’s far too little I can do... but even so, he’s a precious friend.)

When Rudel had helped him out so much, when Aleist thought he could finally repay his debt, he smiled.

(Aah, but in that case, I might become useless. Well, if Rudel’s there, that’s some reassurance. And this is for the best.)

Gripping the exchange stone over Rudel’s body, Aleist closed his eyes.

A blue light enveloped the two of them. Aleist whispered, making sure those around couldn’t hear—

“The cheat I have received... I return my abilities. I don’t need inexhaustible mana or talent. My noble family... I’m fine as long as they’re safe. I don’t mind if they forget about me. So... please bring my friend back to life. I don’t need anything else.”

The cheat he received on his reincarnation was inexhaustible mana.

(I’m sorry I never managed to master it to the end.)

Along with a talent in various fields, and charm.

(Talent alone was no good. Without the effort to polish it... thank you for everything.)

To that point, Aleist had been protected by a great many cheats.

“Thank you for all you’ve given me. Perhaps this can’t be called payment. If it’s not enough, you can take my existence as well. My friend—please bring Rudel back to life. I’m begging you!”

As he strongly gripped the exchange stone, Aleist could feel the power leave his own body.

All the great powers that had helped, protected, and enhanced him.

Aleist shed a tear.

“Thank you for everything.”

Aleist got the feeling the last bit of power lingered around him. He got the feeling it asked him if he'd be fine without them.

“I'll be alright. I'm sorry I never mastered you. You have my dearest thanks.”

The power faded. Aleist could feel the last ounce of it drain away; he instinctually understood various abilities had disappeared from within him.

He looked at Rudel.

The wound had closed, and with even his armor mended, Rudel opened his eyes.

“Rudel!”

Aleist cried out, as Rudel raised his torso from the stretcher. Delight spread around, Izumi leaped forward to embrace Rudel, and Aleist warmly watched over the scene.

But the one Rudel jumped up and held tight was Aleist.

“Aleist, my man!”

“Eh? Wait a second! With the way things were going, why me!?”

To Aleist's confusion, the suspicious eyes of Izumi and the other women gathered.



## Chapter 160: I Kinda Don't Really Get it

"You bloody fool!"

Eunius placed a hand on Rudel's head and ruffled up his hair. His voice was filled with true delight, while there were tears visible in his eyes.

"You really did a number on us. You too, Aleist."

Luecke delightedly stuck up the thumb of his gloved hand, directing a smile towards Aleist.

However, while being embraced by Rudel, and receiving smiles from the boys...

"Hey, way. Seriously, give me a minute! Rudel, I do think there's someone else you should be hugging here!"

As Aleist attempted to peel Rudel off, Izumi looked on with a conflicted expression.

"Don't tell me these two are..." or so Millia even sent them doubtful eyes. Rudel parted, patting his hair in place as he shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't be stupid. It is only natural I give my thanks to my life's savior. Mn? Oh Izumi, I see you're here too."

A bitter smile from Izumi, upon being treated as an extra.

"I really am happy. Though a part of me can't rejoice..."

For just an instant. A very brief instant, Izumi directed a look of hostility at Aleist. A chill ran down his spine.

In order to overcome this situation, he hurriedly tried assisting Rudel to understand the situation.

"M-more importantly, about where we are now—"

Rudel slowly stepped down from the stretcher he'd been lying on and stretched out his back. He was confirming the state of his body as he received his weapons Aleist's harem members had secured.

“Oh, that’s right.”

A look at the battlefield, and even now, Sakuya was fighting the Gora to hold it in place.

The imperial army units reformed, with the forces on both flanks headed their way.

Rudel looked at the imperial army and offered a word.

“Now then... let’s go.”

He was going to fight the minute he revived. Aleist hurriedly stepped in to stop him.

“No, I wonder about that! How about some rest? It looks like more forces are gathering as we speak.”

The one who approached them was Chlust.

“Brother!”

“Chlust... you, what about the evacuees?”

Chlust breathed a sigh of relief upon confirming Rudel’s safety. He explained the state of affairs.

“They’re fine. I’ve already handed them off. Joining the reinforcements of the Arses House, I come bearing a force of five thousand. They need a commander. These numbers are impossible for me.”

The reason Chlust deemed it impossible was simply because he had no experience leading so many troops. Additionally, he never received commander training at the academy.

“You’ve all been educated in that field. You have real combat experience to boot. Brother, if you’ll just take command—”

Rudel reached his right hand towards Chlust, opening his palm in the gesture of ‘wait’. And after looking at the sky, he returned his gaze to Chlust.

“I’m sorry, but while I’ve undergone the coursework, I am lacking in experience. I must pass the torch to Major Bennet.”

With the talks suddenly turned her way, Bennet’s hair and ears stood on end

as she shook her head.

“Don’t ask the impossible. I have never taken charge of a land force of this scale. Rather, if anyone here is to take the right to command...”

Bennet’s gaze shifted to Rudel, Aleist, Luecke, then Eunius in turn.

— They all averted their eyes.

“Major, I am a dragoon. I lack the experience to command ground troops. I have no idea where to start!”

“Hey, I’m a dragoon too! And wait, you definitely got the education at the academy!”

The reason Aleist looked away was simply because he had no confidence. Having lost his cheat, at this point, even he didn’t know whether or not he had the power to fight.

Eunius looked at Luecke, his gaze speaking, ‘Just do it’.

But Luecke—

“It does seem there is a troublesome unit with a magic circle prepared. Good grief, I doubt anyone but me will be able to handle it. I must head off. I leave the rest to you. Now tally ho, Vargas!”

“H-hey, are you serious!?”

“Like I care. Not my problem, not going to deal with it.”

— He scrambled to be the first one off.

Taken aback, Eunius picked up his weapon and started from the spot.

“O-oh, now that I’ve got a closer look, that’s General Rhoshwas’ flag over there. My house’s got a score to settle with that bloke. Yep. I’ve got to go take care of that.”

Later! Said Eunius, leading his men to take flight.

All eyes gathered on Rudel and Aleist.

“B-brother?”

Chlust looked at Rudel.

(Well, Rudel's far worthier than me.)

There, Rudel whistled. Reacting to that whistle, Sakuya lifted into the air, and descended beside him.

Rudel cleared his throat.

"It's that, you know. As long as that black one's there, it's meaningless no matter your numbers. So I think someone has to take on the top dragon and bottom giant."

Once everyone agreed that was a valid point, Sakuya loomed over Rudel, and reached her hand.

Immediately jumping onto its palm, Rudel addressed the rest of them.

"I'm a dragoon, so Chlust, I'm leaving the ground troops to you. Aleist!"

"Me?"

Rudel pointed at the Gora.

"I'll take on the black dragon up top. You take care of that black thing."

Aleist hurriedly refuted it.

"No, I don't have any power any—"

Rudel smiled.

"Don't worry. Sakuya told me at the entrance to the world beyond. You'll be just fine. Now onward, Aleist!"

With a large flap of Sakuya's wings, Rudel was set for the skies. When Izumi jumped up to chase after him, Sakuya carefully caught her and placed her on her back.

"... Huh?"

Hearing he would be fine, Aleist looked at the gora, only to find it was coming right at them. Now that Sakuya was gone, it seemed Aleist was the first on its list.

"Wait a second!!"

In Aleist's dismay, his faithful nightmare Heath drew close.

“Y-you... where have you been?”

Breathing a sigh, Millia gave it to Aleist.

“Aleist, get a grip. If you don’t do something about that, we’ll all be in danger! Hey, I’ll help out, so just hurry.”

Aleist nodded. Bennet shrugged her shoulders.

“You have my cooperation. I’m sure it’ll be hard for the black knight alone. Still, we’ll need just a bit more manpower.”

To Bennet’s words, Aleist—

“If we had just... one more dragoon.”

A new dragoon made entered the stage from directly overhead.

“Did you call?”

There, the man boasting the number one aerial technique in the dragoon brigade, Keith, looked at Aleist with a glint in his eye.

“Keith-san!”

“It’s a request of my dear Aleist-kun. Yep, how about I lend a hand.”

Bennet’s face twitched.

“Keith... where have you been this whole time?”



High in the sky.

Around were the dragons fighting against the black wyverns.

Soaring through the wide sky filled with tempestuous dogfights, Sakuya was delighted to have Rudel riding her back.

‘I thought I would never see you again!’

Rudel gently stroked the back of the delighted, crying dragon.

“I’m sorry. But it’s alright now.”

Having died once and come back, Rudel made a bit of a liberated face. Izumi took a look at him and posed the question out of curiosity.

“Did something happen?”

Rudel closed his eyes, he recalled what had happened at death’s door.

“I made Sakuya mad.”

“Me?”

To the dragon’s Sakuya’s confusion, “A different Sakuya,” Rudel said, opening his eyes wide to look at the sky. Before his eyes, the form of a wyvern coming at Sakuya, it’s large mouth ajar.

Holding his right hand forward, Rudel produced a sword of light, put a spin on it and fired it at the wyvern.

Receiving the blade, the wyvern’s head was blown off, as it turned to black smoke and faded away.

“A dragoon is complete with human and dragon. Why did I send you away? She asked.”

Izumi smiled just a little sorrowfully.

“I see. So she helped you out.”

Rudel issued orders to Sakuya.

“Sakuya, a dragoon’s true domain is the sky. Let’s show those imperials the power of a true dragoon.”

‘Yeah!’

When Sakuya roared, the wyverns in the sky directed their hostility towards Rudel.

The one directing it most was the vile serpent.

Approaching Sakuya, it opened its large mouth and breathed its breath.

‘You really are obstinate! I’ll send you to the other side, however many times it takes!’

Laughing at the dark dragon’s words,

“Now that would be troublesome. I wouldn’t want Sakuya scolding me too many times. And I’m a dragoon. Now that my partner is here, you’ll soon learn

I'm a bit different."

Issuing orders to Sakuya, he exchanged breath for breath.

When Sakuya used her four wings to suddenly turn, the vile serpent gave chase.

'You can't run away!'

When the dragon opened its large mouth towards the back Sakuya showed, Rudel laughed.

"Run? Far from it."

Holding his right hand straight out at the dragon, Rudel produced a number of extra large swords around them. Rotating them, he hammered them at the moment before it could fire a breath 'Guuh!!'

The serpent's head was enveloped in smoke. However, it didn't seem to take any major damage.

'Is that all you've got!? Get them!'

As the surrounding wyverns began advancing on Sakuya, the swords Rudel produced were fired off towards them.

They pierced, exploded, and disintegrated wyverns into black smoke.

"Is that all you've got?"

On Rudel's provocation, the vile serpent opened its blood-red eyes wide.

'You blasted irregulars!! ...!'

The serpent opened its large mouth and spread its wings to exclaim. But It was then the surrounding dragons all turned to fire on it at once.

And as it endured, a blue dragon approached from right above.

'Twas Mystith.

'You're top's wide open!'

Lowering a fist from overhead, she slammed the serpent into the ground head-first. While it was an attack with all of her might, the wounds from butchering any a wyvern stood out on her body.

‘Alright!’

“Alright!”

Mystith cinched it with a pose. And... so did Lena on her back.

Spotting her, Rudel was dumbfounded.

“What are you doing, Lena!?”

Izumi was just as surprised. But Lena sent Rudel a wing, as she raised one arm in greeting.

“I, Lena Arses have from today onward become Mystith’s partner! Best regards, bronin!”

‘That’s how it is.’

Mystith’s acceptance did little to alleviate Rudel’s confusion. But this wasn’t the right place to sit and dawdle.

“I-is that so. There’s plenty I’d like to hear, but that thing comes first.”

Looking down, there was the form of the serpent rising off of the ground. It seemed to be feeling it in the head as it birthed a large new batch of wyverns from its body.

Mystith sounded vexed.

‘Tsk, it multiplied again. I’m not losing to the likes of them, but there are too many. Just approaching the black one’s a pain.’

Rudel looked at the ground.

“Mystith-sama... could you leave it to me and Sakuya? We’ve developed that quite a bit?”

Upon hearing that, Mystith readily nodded.

‘Well why not. But that whelp called us lizards. You’ve got to hammer it home.’

Izumi thought back.

“Rudel, don’t tell me, what you used in Celestia...”

The sinister serpent that rose towards Rudel. As if to invite it in, Sakuya



soared higher and higher into the sky.

“Come, I’ll take you on.”

‘Step aside, lowly side character!’

The serpent fired its breath into the sky, but Sakuya avoided on Rudel’s orders. Distancing themselves from the battlefield of dragon and wyvern, they turned to face their challenger.

Breaking through the clouds into the endless sky above.

The two dragons faced off.

‘You never stop getting in our way. If you’ll come back upon death, this time we won’t let even ash remain!’

On the serpent’s vigorous roar, Sakuya slowly took her stance in the air.

“Let me teach you something nice.”

‘... What.’

“Don’t make like of a dragoon. Just one knight and one dragon but... put them together, and I’ll teach you just how troublesome we can be.”

‘Sakuya and Rudel are the strongest!’

With Sakuya’s roar, the serpent lunged at the two, Sakuya opened her four wings wide, and Rudel unleashed the power of the white knight.

“I couldn’t show it on land, but here it won’t be a problem. Sakuya, we’re going all out.”

‘Yeah!’

As the light overflowing from Rudel enveloped Sakuya, symbols began to surface over her body.

Apart from her four wings, another pair made of light...

Forming an armor of light to protect her, giving off a divine light. Further behind the wings, a golden circle formed.

Izumi looked at that form, containing her hair swaying from the breeze as she muttered.

“... Breathtaking.”

The white dragon wore golden armor, and pinned down the serpent coming at them with both hands.

‘W-what!?’

The serpent was surprised. It noticed Sakuya was different than she had been a moment ago.

Sakura roared as she got in a right hook. Reeling back, the serpent disappeared into the clouds, firing a breath off from within them.

A number of golden shields manifested around Sakuya to obstruct it.

The serpent burst out of the clouds, raising its speed to circle around in an attempt to catch Sakuya off guard.

But Sakuya immediately reacted and followed suit. With Sakuya right behind it, maintaining an exact distance and giving chase, the serpent was put on the rung.

‘C-curses. Curse you!!’

It stopped, turned, and fired a breath, but elegantly avoiding it, Sakuya’s sure-fire special—

‘One, two, finish!’

Left, right, tail, three consecutive attacks smashed into the dragon. The impact greatly shifted the clouds and changed their shape. Cracks raced through the serpent’s skin they had never managed to pierce, as dragon blood was shed.

‘M-mocking me...’

The serpent flared at Rudel and Sakuya. It seemed it was unforgivable for a dragon to bring the smackdown.

Izumi seemed to understand those feelings just a bit.

“Well, it certainly is a little unfair.”

Rudel looked at the vile serpent, folding his arms.

“Playtime ends here.”

It was then that the serpent burst into laughter.

‘I see. The exchange stone. Aleist used the powers residing in his body as compensation to bring you back!’

The laughing dragon looked at Rudel, pointing a finger. While it was unknown how it looked into it, it seemed to know the means through which Rudel was brought back.

“Correct.”

Rudel made it short, preparing for his next attack.

‘Then it was a mistake to pull me away. You should have remained. Right around now, the gora will have run them all down. As long as I hold you here, victory is our—’

“... Unfortunately, that’s not happening.”

Interrupting the serpent’s words, Rudel informed it.

“The three who remained on ground, Aleist, Luecke and Eunius are my dear friends. We fought at the academy time and again, and I went through great pains each time.”

Rudel slowly pulled his sword, directing its point at the serpent.

“Don’t you dare make light of them. Even if Aleist loses inexhaustible mana and talent, and a great deal else... what he built up won’t fade away. That guy is strong. He’s the man I’ve recognized.”

The serpent roared and came at Sakuya.

Sakuya spread out her six large wings wide, to meet it.

## Chapter 161: Those Who Can't Run

A general in the imperial army, Bahn Rhoshwas had begun his march on a request from the main body.

His army was composed of only humans, for no other reason than that he couldn't trust monsters. As a matter of fact, the monsters from the main force had all gone berserk. One moment, he thought they'd disappeared, and the next they were on a rampage.

"Under a sky of several hundred dragons, they want me to launch an attack on the enemy camp..."

To those of the empire, the dragon could only be a symbol of fear.

The reason they termed those of Courtois as cowards in general was because they were protected by those dragons.

Their own forces had given rise to enhanced monsters, and just when he thought they'd finally reached the stage they'd be able to put up a decent fight against Courtois, they were impossible to control.

"We're retreating after we retrieve Prince Askewell. There is no victory to be found on these fields."

The army's main body was still trying to fight. No, Bahn didn't let it slip his eyes that they weren't properly reigned in.

Yet regardless of what Bahn did, it wasn't long before a Courtois army was drawing near.

"General Rhoshwas! An enemy army is headed our way! That flag... it's Diade!"

Bahn's expression turned sour.

"So that Diade comes out at this timing?"

The Diade House could be called the strongest of Courtois' ground troops.

Bahn had fought them a number of times, and every time had ended inconclusively. Before one side could triumph, the dragoons would storm in,

leaving him no choice but to retreat.

Retreat wasn't an option this time.

"Tear through them to rescue our allies. Drag along those main force fools who're still up to fight and retreat!"

On Bahn's words, his tempered legion moved all at once.



Riding a specially prepared carriage, Leor was enraged.

"Each and every one of them, trash that can't understand magic! What did I tell them? I told them to lure the dragons my way, but not only do they fail to listen, they demand I send reinforcements to them... I'll make test subjects of the lot of them."

Muttering complaints, Leor wore a robe over his skin of an unhealthy color. He didn't wear any armor.

He had his pride as a magician, and he knew protective gear was unnecessary.

A subordinate nearing his carriage informed him of the state of the magic circle.

"Leor-sama, the around seventy percent of the sigils are ready. But there is an army coming towards us."

He couldn't exhibit his full might on an incomplete circle. Leor laughed.

"Perfect. It may not be complete, but it's an anti-dragon magic circle... I'll blow any human army away. That's right. They should have just obeyed my orders from the start. His highness so joyed with just enhancing monsters, and that aide gora of his; I'll show them all. Just how wonderful my magic can be!"

Stepping down from the carriage, he ordered along his men as he made towards the center of the circle. Rescuing Askewell didn't even occur to him in his eagerness to show off just how superior he was.

"The empire shall know. Rather than relying on monsters, they should have relied on me... Ahahahah!"

While Leor said so, he was supported by subordinates on both shoulders.

Through repeated research and experimentation spanning many a year, his body had grown terribly slender. Stamina-wise, he boasted a considerable problem.



The main force Askewell led was being ordered by Mies.

However, the rampage of his other men was terrible.

“General Mies, the armies on both flanks are rushing to our aid!”

“We’ll hammer down what Courtois’s army in one fell swoop!”

Seeing the knights and soldiers speak with such delight, Mies was distraught.

“What are you talking about? There’s no way we can fight in this situation. We’re retreating. Yes, that’s what we’ll do! We can’t control them anymore!”

One of the knights spoke.

His expression was somewhat suspicious. For a moment, she got a sense his eyes let off a red light.

“It will be fine, General Mies. The gora that Prince Askewell has possessed did not attack any of our men who approached. This is the perfect opportunity. The perfect change to finally win one against Courtois.”

Askewell had been taken in by a gora.

Phrasing it as the opposite, the second-in-command raised the hopes of those around.

In her distress, Mies couldn’t notice the knight was different from usual.

“Have both flanks stand down at once! If we don’t retreat fast, something terrible will... the sky above is nothing but dragons!”

To the empire’s knights and soldiers, dragons were their gods of death. However, in this situation, more than despair, the troops sought out the victory they had long craved.

“We cannot pull back like this! If we retreat, that means we will have lost to a single knight. Not a dragoon, our forces were breached by a lone knight... only hell awaits on our return.”

A collected-looking knight said so, and those around nodded.

They had taken too much time on Rudel alone. That was not coming back to bite them, cornering the imperial army—or rather, those who had actually fought into a state where they couldn't withdraw even if they wanted to.

Mies held her head and cried out.

“All troops prepare to retreat! Your commanding officer is—Eh?”

A few knights and soldiers turned their weapons on her.

“You'll have to keep quiet a while. There's nowhere left for us. Do you not understand that? To prepare such an army and yield no results... shall never be forgiven.”

Preparing the monster army alone was a considerable strain on the empire.

On top of that, they formed two armies surpassing ten thousand to attack on two fronts.

If this failed, the empire would be driven to a crisis of possible collapse.

“If the land we took is taken back, the empire will fall apart. I want you to understand that.”

The situation was more urgent than Mies had imagined. As she sat on the spot and hung her head, the soldiers led her off. Finally, the knight,

“Hurry up and reorganize our formation! Let those cowards of Courtois know the grudge of the empire!”

Watching these zealous imperial knights and soldiers—practically dead men walking—who knew there was no future ahead of them, Mies took one last look at the gora that had assimilated Askewell.

(So no one needs him anymore...)



Mounting his faithful steed Heath, Aleist held a sword in one hand and gripped it hard.

He didn't have the inexhaustible mana he once possessed. He didn't have talent. Even his charm had been lost.

Could such a man fight the gora coming towards them?

As he cowered over such questions and fears, Millia took a seat behind him with her bow. They were riding the nightmare in tandem.

One of the harem members pointed at Millia.

“That bitch!”

Millia barked back at the rest of them.

“Oh, shut it! If it was any of you, you’d be at each other’s throats, so I got on behind him. So quit your whining, and prepare for battle already!”

Scolded away by Millia, the harem member reluctantly obeyed and prepared to fight the beast.

Behind them, an army to support them stood in rank and file under Chlust’s orders.

Chlust looked like he was going to cry as he issued out orders, entering preparations to hold the army at bay. Upon seeing that, Aleist managed to calm down just a bit.

“Aleist, you’ll be fine, won’t you?”

On Millia’s worried voice, Aleist mulled a smidgen before he nodded.

“I’ll be fine. But honestly, whether we can beat that thing or not is...”

Heath shook his head and neighed. As if he was telling him to do his best.

In the sky, two water dragons awaited his orders to fight.

Millia breathed out a sigh.

“God, have some confidence. Rudel was fighting against that thing the whole time. When you’re able to exchange punches with that very same Rudel, there’s no way you’ll go down too easily.”

Aleist recalled those matches, and the fists he exchanged.

In his battles with Rudel, in the end, it was always their weapons that gave out first. In that case, what was left was a full-on fist extravaganza.

“I wasn’t exchanging punches because I wanted to.”



Aleist personally would have preferred more stylish, more elegant matches. But he was always pushed to the brink and got to thinking he never had the leisure.

However, upon looking around.

“Well, it looks like everyone apart from me is reliable enough.”

In game terms, his harem members were competent pieces. What’s more, in the sky were two dragons supporting him. Two dragoon knights as well.

Game-wise, this was a satisfactory party, or rather, these numbers were greater than what could be deployed at once. Aleist delivered a light kick to Heath’s stomach.

With that alone, Heath made a straight dash for the Gira.

Millia readied her bow.

“Aleist, I’m counting on you.”

“Yeah, it’ll probably work out.”

Hearing his somewhat unreliable response, Millia laughed. Standing up on horseback, she took an arrow in hand, pulled it, and fired.

She had aimed for Askewell taken in by the Gora, yet the arrow was repelled by the gora’s thick finger. Just by spreading its palm, the giant had Askewell completely protected.

“The fact it protected him means that really must be its weak point. But seeing how Rudel couldn’t take aim at it, it must have a solid defense, perhaps?”

As Heath gradually increased speed, the gora lowered two of its four arms down towards him. Heath ran straight at the lowered fists, and cleared them as Millia fired an arrow at the gora from below.

“Oh my, it’s not just a grass skirt.

Carefully observing the gora that was properly wearing pants under that, Millia gave an indifferent analysis before immediately firing an arrow.

“Eep!” Aleist mouthed a small scream. But it didn’t look like it had any effect

on the far-too-large Gora.

“How can you just aim at the crotch like that!?”

When Aleist told her that, Millia scoffed.

“Like it or not, it’s a vital point.”

She said, this time taking out multiple arrows and firing them. They all carried more force than the previous one, piercing deep into its nether regions.

The Gora cried out.

“Alright!”

Seeing Millia triumphantly clench her fist, Aleist was beginning to pity the gora.

Gripping the sword he held in one hand, he swung it towards the beast’s ankle.

A black magic flame coiled about the blade, and once he released it, the gora’s foot was severed through.

(I can still fight.)

What he lost was great, yet there was much he had built on his own, and what remained became his strength to overcome this monster.

While the gora tried to deal with Aleist, who was passing right beneath it, the breath attacks of dragons from the sky knocked it back.

Heath moved so as not to be dragged in with its fall as Millia looked around. Imperial knights and soldiers were charging towards them.

“When we’re busy taking on this monster!”

Aleist drew his left-hand sword as well, swinging them from horseback to cut down those closes. It was the perfect unity of horse and rider.

No, rather than that, Heath was the one matching Aleist’s movements. As Milla fired arrows from behind him, the knights wearing iron armor were pierced through.

Aleist’s harem members gathered to occupy the gathering army.

“You’re in the way!”

Seli cut down all before her with her skilled swordplay.

“In the way!”

Juju threw, punched and kicked the knights and soldiers coming close.

Aleist confirmed that before turning back to the gora.

“If it recovers that fast, we won’t be able to chip it down.”

Before the gora that instantly recovered from its injuries, Aleist thought over how he should approach. He thought, but he was never too smart to begin with.

It was inevitable that the long worn-out methods were the first things to hit him.

“Then you either attack it so fast its regeneration can’t keep up, or defeat it in one blow... but I don’t have any attacks as flashy as Rudel’s.”

Lopping off the arms of the gora attempting to stand, Aleist thought. His surroundings were beginning to become a muddled mess of enemy and ally, the field rapidly growing more difficult to fight.

The gora spread the wings on its back, rising into the sky.

“Can’t let it add another dimension to this—Bennet-san, Keith-san!”

On Aleist’s cry, the two dragons attacked so the gora couldn’t rise up. Tearing its wings and smacking it with dragon fist, they removed any means of escape.

Jumping up from Heath’s back, Aleist transferred over to the Gora, tearing open flesh below him as he raced up its body. Despite its large palm’s attempt to capture him, he cut that palm open with a sword in each hand, making for Askewell’s embedded body.

“I see it.”

Racing from the massive gora’s foot to its head, Aleist swung his sword at Askewell the moment he was in sight.

If it had any weakpoint, he thought it had to be there, but the gora stuck its glare on Aleist and opened its large mouth.

It seemed it was going to spit up a large mass of those black spears it used on Rudel. In its mouth opening, he could see the countless tips of spiraling polearms.

Aleist manifested from his shadow a cloth-like black mass, spreading it out to protect himself.

Even if a spear pierced through, the material would wrap around , catch it, and take the blow.

And once the black cloth vanished, Aleist jumped out and pointed his sword at Askewell.

“This is the end!”

At the last moment, Askewell who had been buried to his shoulders opened his eyes; he raised an arm and stopped Aleist’s attack.

Gripping the sword between his fingertips, he looked at Aleist.

“... I see, so you’re the cause of all this.”

After regaining consciousness, Askewell crawled out from the gora, looked at Aleist and spoke.

“It is for the sake of your existence that my people suffer... I shall not forgive you!”

Black smoke poured out of Askewell, as the gora disappeared. Having suddenly lost his footing, Aleist entrusted his body to freefall as he trained his eyes upwards. Askewell’s form remained, standing right where he was in the air.

“So it ain’t over yet?”

After Aleist was recovered by Millia, who had spread out her magic wings, he looked up at the black smoke whirling up, and the prince.

## Chapter 162: Sword and Magic

Eunius straddled his horse, commanding the private army he brought with him to face off with the army of General Bahn.

On this chaotic battlefield, both sides had their command in relative order. Albeit, only relative to the rest. The reason they couldn't pay undo mind to keeping formation lay in the black giant nearby—the gora recklessly thrashing around.

Eunius took a glance in its direction.

“I'd like to end this while Aleist is keeping it busy; then I can go help him out.”

Even if the sky was beyond him, he could help as long as it was on land. But regardless of what wanted to do, the matter wouldn't be settled so easily.

Bahn Rhoshwas—a general who had worked his way up, a seasoned veteran of the empire, and a strong opponent in land battles. While he didn't stand out due to the existence of the dragoons, Eunius' father had held a close fight with him more than a few times.

The dragoons would come out before the victor could be decided, so there was no score to keep. Which side was stronger? Both countries likewise regarded the question as wholly inconsequential.

Yet on a battlefield where they couldn't borrow the dragoons' aid, it would hold a large meaning. The quality of troops at Eunius' home the Diade House was high.

But the opponent was a prominent force of the empire.

Eunius licked his lips.

“Go at it making light of them, and we'll be devoured.”

He said, pulling his sword as he looked at the faces of his enemy—the faces of elite soldiers.

“Run them down!”

The numbers were even, or perhaps the other side had a slight advantage.

The empire had supplemented a majority of their forces with monsters. For that sake, the numbers of humans were lower than expected.

The soldiers Eunius led wrung out their voices, gripped their weapons and collided with enemy forces.

The frontmost soldiers clashed, filling the air with the sounds of clanging metal and shouts.

With both sides accustomed to battle, slight casualties didn't fluster them in the slightest.

But perhaps the opponent's side was short on time, they came out with hard offensive measures.

A large-build man on a horse grandly brandished his battle axe, butchering soldiers on Eunius' side.

Swinging around a large axe that-at a glance-made clear the strength of his arms, he made a straight line towards Eunius.

The official to Eunius' side cried out.

"Young master! He plans to take you out and pierce straight through our army."

Eunius gave a small laugh.

"Is he mocking me? Or is he out of time... looks like both!"

Kicking his horse's stomach, he had his allies ahead of him stand back as he raced towards the unit led by General Bahn.

Upon seeing that, Bahn performed a wide swing with his axe to cut Eunius down; but Eunius caught the blow with his greatsword. The horses both rode had stopped in their tracks, their hooves sinking into the earth

Once a conspicuously large metallic sound had chimed across the battlefield, both enemy and ally had begun taking distance from the two.

General Bahn glared at Eunius.

"Youngling, are you related to Diade?"

Eunius held up his greatsword in one hand, directing its tip towards the

general.

“The eldest son. You’re Bahn Rhoshwas, right? I’ve heard about you. Heard there was some bloke my old man couldn’t take out.”

As General Bahn clenched the hilt of his battle axe, it let off a grinding, grating noise. His muscles swelled and raised a sound.

“Oh quit it. You’re just another coward protected by the dragon, I’d usually say. But if your Diade’s brat, that changes things up a bit. You lot are just about the only ones to hold back my army’s charge.”

Each side holding high their weapon of choice, what followed was a simple clash of steel.

Sparks scattered.

“But youngling... now you’re in the way. I’ll send your old man down afterward. Go wait for him in hell.”

Holding his sword horizontally to block the strike from on high, Eunius grit his teeth.

(What weight. This guy really is strong.)

Eunius felt his own horse’s shaking legs and tried to ward the blow aside, yet his attempt had General Bahn forcefully blow him off of his horse.

“Protect the young master!”

The knight who went out front was promptly cut down.

Eunius rolled across the ground before immediately standing and shouting out.

“Don’t get in the way! I’ll take him down.”

Looking down on Eunius from horseback, Bahn scoffed at those words.

“You look halfway competent, but you’ll stand before me with that level of skill? Your head’s in the clouds.”

But Eunius had properly measured out his opponent’s abilities.

“That so? But I got it with that one. I’d love to have fought you in your

heyday, old man.”

It was a provocation, that the aged Bahn was lacking.

“... Youngling, I’ll praise your tongue if nothing else!”

General Bahn galloped his horse, lifting his axe, charging at Eunius to slice him in twain. Eunius lowered his hips and watched his movements.

(You’re definitely strong, old man. But you know... I’m even stronger. And I know people far stronger than me!)

As he watched his foe’s movements, Eunius was overcome by a sensation as if time was passing by in slow motion. He concentrated, and matching General Bahn’s motions, he swung his great sword.

The sword was clad in light, and as that light grew stronger, he finished his cut before the general was within sword range.

“You fool. You grew impatient—nngh!!”

General Bahn spat up blood. Holding his mouth, he fell from his horse back; his axe pierced into the ground as he fell to his knees.

A single large wound across his chest.

Eunius’ magic sword has inflicted a blow on him. Seeing that, Bahn sipped his mouth, stood, and took a stance with his axe.

“Hey now, I felt quite some resistance.”

While Eunius felt resistance on his blade, it did seem General Bahn was far tougher than he’d anticipated. The general laughed.

“Gahahahah! Youngling, I’ve been fighting from before you were born. Like hell it’d be so easy to off me. But... I’ll admit you’re not all talk.”

While his subordinates gathered around him, Bahn had them step down.

“... No complaints, having you as my last foe. No, guess you wouldn’t want this old man. I’d have loved to have fought you ten. Nay, twenty years earlier.”

Eunius laughed.

“Don’t be stupid. You’d cross axe with rattle?”



The two laughed, their looks gradually shifting to serious as the surrounding air tense up. Around them, ally and enemy fought, yet their minds were taken by the duel.

And the two stepped in and passed by.

It happened in an instant.

A large cut opened up on Eunius' arm, leaking some blood.

But General Bahn collapsed right on the spot.

The ground flowed with a heavy torrent of red.

"... Youngling. Your name?"

"Eunius. It's Eunius Diade."

"I see. A good name. I'll be waiting in hell. Until our next match..."

When General Bahn used up the last of his strength, the surrounding imperial soldiers lowered their weapons one after the next. Eunius saw that and shouted out.

"Don't kill those who've surrendered. Spread the word... Bahn Rhoshwas has fallen to Eunius Diade! Cease your resistance!"

His subordinate raced over.

"Young master! The sky!"

Looking in the direction he pointed, the gora had vanished, leaving a scene of black smoke rising up onto the sky.

"I've got a bad feeling about this... Rudel, just end this already."



Meanwhile.

Luecke's army marched in close formation.

Vargas barked from nearby.

"Maintain formation! Don't disperse under any circumstances!"

Knights toting shields engraved with magic circles stood at predetermined

positions hoisting up their shields Upon confirming that, Luecke used his magic.

A pale green flame broke out around, his army, dispersing the lightning that rained down from above. An intense explosive sound rose as the earth was gouged out.

“We’re lucky the ground was damp. Otherwise, the dust cloud would be terrible.”

Vargas cried out at Luecke’s words.

“Not that it matters, young master! Do something about this. At this rate, the magic will keep coming down, and we won’t get any closer.”

The enemy was stationed on a low hill, having prepared a circle there, and was firing off magic from it. That alone wasn’t a problem, but the magic output was way too high.

If they took on a single blow, it would be enough to inflict serious damage unto the entirety of Luecke’s forces.

He managed to elude those attacks, utilizing the shields to cast large-scale spellcrafts.

Luecke toughed his hand to his chin.

“But how curious. With that setup I can make out from a distance, they should have a higher output. That’s what I’ve been preparing for with each defensive measure but... is it not yet complete? Still preparing?”

As one who used magic, he held a genuine curiosity. This was despite Vargas’ pleas.

“You can think about it later, but just do something now. If it gets complete, we’re all in danger!”

Luecke felt somewhat let down.

(If this had nothing to do with Rudel and the others, and our motherland wasn’t in peril, I wouldn’t mind waiting for them to complete it... more so, I should invade after insuring it’s complete to thoroughly investigate their circle. No, there’s no such time... what a waste. If Lena weren’t here, I’d watch a while longer.)

While he looked the type to prioritize his own interest, at the same time, he was also considering his means of attack.

“... Vargas. The enemy is clearly making light of us. Otherwise, they can only launch incomplete attacks because their magic circle isn’t fully prepared. I’d rather it not be number one. That would mean with all that careful preparation, they can only fire magic on this paltry level.”

Vargas leaked a sigh. Even in that instant, lightning rained down from the sky to be blocked by Luecke’s magic.

“You wouldn’t believe how thankful I’d be if they were just putting on a show.”

Luecke ignored him and explained.

“Their strength is either equal to, or slightly greater than our magic formation for a simple shield. In that case, it’s simple. We will maintain this formation and charge towards the enemy.”

Hearing that, Vargas opened his mouth.

“Pardon?”

“Charge, I said. Charge.”

Those around couldn’t conceal their hesitation either. They couldn’t think the heir to the Halbades House actually voiced a word like charge. No, they would indeed charge from time to time.

But that was after they had done something about the opponent, and they wouldn’t charge to force through enemy lines like the Diade House.

“... How do you figure?”

With Vargas acting as a representative of surrounding opinion, Luecke spat a sigh.

“Fool. We need only move while keeping the shield up. If our opponent changes the attribute of their magic, we’ll immediately adapt. You’ve all been trained to do so. Simple, right?”

Vargas’ eyes turned teary.

“I’ve said it before, but you know... aren’t you in the wrong family!? Young master, I thought you were kinda... a bit more apt to using your brain!”

“Vargas... don’t think I’m a muscle head like Rudel and the others. I’m an intellectual. All I’m saying is that this is the optimum means of victory. I’ll admit, it vexes me I can’t win over our foe with magic.”

He chose a charge for victory, there wasn’t any particular impatience in Luecke’s eyes. Knowing he didn’t thoughtlessly choose a reckless assault on his first campaign, Vargas didn’t rebut him anymore.

However...

“Alright, you’ve all got to properly fulfill your own roles. We’ll be swiftly changing formation on the move. Everyone’s coordination will be the key.”

Vargas cried out yet again.

“Change formation in transit!? This isn’t any ordinary formation, young master! The spells are reproduced by the positioning of the shield knights, and asking them to—”

Luecke shook his head, placing a hand on Vargas’ shoulder.

“Do it. That is an order, Vargas.”

When he was so kindly informed with a smile, “Yes” was all that was left to say.

And the Halbades House’s moving army spread about a bit from its close-knit formation.

Luecke began his move to the center.

As they would have to make delicate adjustments to their positioning, while Luecke rode a horse, the shield knights had to dismount theirs and go on foot.

The march began once Luecke was in place.

This time, a mountainous load of large fireballs was fired off from the enemy camp. While they were many in numbers, they also had a speed, and it was in a rain of fire that Luecke’s men were to move.

“Change formation. Water.”

Abiding by his orders, the shield knights hastily moved and took their places as a pale blue light enveloped their surroundings.

The flames that collided directly went out. The places on the ground set ablaze by those that missed faded away as soon as they touched against the pale light.

Luecke watched for his foe's reaction.

(Now then, what's their verdict on our approach... here it comes. )

The soldiers-presumably guards-on standby took up their weapons, and started on their way towards him. As the imperial soldiers approached, Vargas and the others drew their weapons at the ready.

But the enemy troops were few in numbers.

Luecke grimaced.

"... Decoys."

While the magic from the enemy camp had stopped for a moment, the problem was that they were preparing for another round.

"Vargas, the shield knights shall prioritize maintaining formation. Everyone else, protect the shield knights."

Drawing his sabre from its sheath, Luecke began commanding his troops.

Vargas retorted.

"It's supposed to be the other way around! We were brought up to protect you and our allies!"

Luecke shot back.

"Shut it! Just do it! If you guys misstep, we won't be able to block enemy fire!"

As soon as he had said that, the enemy camp was at it again.

"Next earth!"

As Luecke ordered the shield knights to change formation, the others provided support. The imperial soldiers were few in numbers, and while they

fought desperately, they were taken down one after the next.

(They don't mind firing on allies, eh. Can't say I respect that. But it'll pick up the pace.)

"Here it comes!"

The enemy soldiers outside the formation were swept up into a tornado and blown into the air. Upon seeing that, many soldiers gave up their resistance.

Cast down your weapons and surrender. We are increasing our speed to the enemy camp.

Vargas posed Luecke the question.

"Will the enemy wait for us? Shouldn't they already by—"

But Luecke firmly declared.

"They'll be there. They can't move. They're too fixated on their magic after all."

And with those words, the Halbades House army continued its advance.

What they came upon once they were right at the camp were the magicians who had still remained on the site.

In chaos, abandoned by their guard knights and soldiers and left behind.

In the center of the magic circle, a single unhealthy-looking man in a robe raised his voice. His ear perked at the chipped and uncanny voice, Luecke urged on his horse.

"Y-you utter fools! Don't let those brutes into the circle! Don't step there! What do you take this artistic magic circle for—"

Luecke looked down on the screaming man—Leor.

"It certainly is a work of art. This deployment, and the sheer beauty of the sigils... I'm sure no ordinary man could even imagine it."

To Luecke's words, Leur knew he had found a kindred spirit. His expression brightened right up.

"Y-you can tell? I never thought I'd find someone in Courtois who could

understand this—”

Luecke’s sabre stuck into Leor’s chest. Witnessing such a scene, the magicians—Leor’s assistants raised screams. Those assistants were quickly apprehended and restrained.

Luecke pulled out his sabre.

“W-why? If you let me live, the secrets of this magic circle could be...”

A portion of the circle was incomplete.

To add to that, there were spots he had erased because the enemy had come.

“You’re right. It really is a pity... but even so, I am a noble, and a knight of Courtois. I have to see beyond the magic. And someday, I’ll unravel the secrets of this circle, just you wait.”

Hearing Luecke’s words filled with confidence, a slight smile crossed Leor’s face.

“That’s impossible. The likes of you... I am a genius...”

Confirming Leor had breathed his last breath, Luecke issued orders to Vargas.

“Vargas, have those with the knowhow accurately copy down the magic circle. The positioning of all the ceremonial equipment as well. Record it all, copy it all, preserve everything important and—”

But before he could finish, Luecke looked at the sky.

In his eyes was a scene of black smoke rising to the sky.

Luecke narrowed his eyes.

“Young master?”

To Vargas’ worried voice, Luecke shook his head.

“Vargas, lead all troops. We’re moving.”

“Are you sure? Isn’t this magic supposed to be amazing?”

Luecke immediately mounted his horse and started off.

“I’ve got something more important to attend to.”

Luecke looked at the sky and muttered.

“Rudel, I can’t really lend a hand if he’s so high up.”

There, Vargas spoke.

“It’d be a whole lot easier if we could attack the sky with this thing.”

Luecke immediately took a look at the circle. It was around sixty percent complete. While a portion had been erased, from what he could see, at the very least, those portions could be reused.

He jumped down from his horse.

“Vargas!”

“Y-yes!?”

“... Well said. Gather up all the shield knights at once. We’re putting this to good use.”



## Chapter 163: Versus

Rudel fought the vile serpent through the sky. It could be called a one-sided battle, mostly consisting of his attempts to corner and land a final blow on the beast.

Sakuya opened her large mouth, and as she was about to fire a breath, the serpent laughed. It stopped running to turn towards Rudel and Sakuya.

Before Rudel and Sakuya—a dragoon of one man and one dragon, the tattered serpent. But now a look of triumph spread across its face.

‘You did well making it this far. You have my praise... dragoon.’

While continuously calling Rudel an irregular, here it was, stopping to evaluate him. But Rudel—

“I see, then disappear. Sakuya!”

Rudel had Sakuya fired on it no questions asked.

‘HYAAaaah!!’

Highly condensed mana swelled to a massive size, the light fired off from it drawing a spiral in its flow as it swallowed the dark dragon whole. With that output before her, Izumi narrowed her eyes.

“It’d be hell if that hit the ground.”

It’s output... Rudel was definitely right in his decision, parting from the ground to avoid dragging anyone else in.

All the clouds around them were blown away by the force of that breath, the thick clouds clearing to shine light onto the battlefield.

But the serpent that took the breath, while it had lost a majority of its body, remained floating in the air. Its disintegrating bones showing, it laughed through its ominous visage.

‘You are strong. No, you ‘two’ are strong together. Very well... I shall admit that.’

Feeling a bad premonition, Rudel immediately readied Sakuya for a second shot.

‘It’s too late!’

The black smoke rising from the ground enveloped the serpent. Prince of the Empire Askewell looked at Rudel from his place in the air.

Rudel grimaced.

“You’re a stubborn one. Did Aleist let you slip by?”

While it was a problem that couldn’t be cleaned up with the word stubborn, Rudel was of the simple belief that he need only defeat him again. In essence, that was the only option.

Askewell opened his mouth.

“Aren’t you—”

“Sakuya, fire.”

“Wait! Rudel!”

Izumi stepped in to stop him but she didn’t make it in time.

Before he could hear Askewell’s words, Sakuya fired her second round.

‘Fly awaaaay!!’

Sakuya’s breath assailed the black smoke and Askewell. Yet, Askewell brushed that blast aside with one hand.

Seeing that, Rudel immediately considered countermeasures.

(He redirected it? Luecke had a magic quite similar to that. Then should I beat him in close combat?)

Askewell showed no surprise, nor did he condemn Rudel for his actions. It was almost as if he had foreseen it happening. He plainly continued to speak.

“Aren’t you irritated?”

“... Irritated? That I let your imperial invasion get so far? Or the fact I couldn’t win on my own?”

They were both irritating to him. He couldn’t fulfill his duty. He couldn’t

protect his country. That was why he had to take Askewell down and drive the imperial army out of kingdom territory.

That was Rudel's job.

Askewell lightly laughed.

"Aleist, was it? For the sake of such a good-for-nothing existence, both me and you were put through the wringer. You were to be nothing more than a stepping stool in his life... I was forced into the role of enemy. You'll overlook such unreasonability?"

Askewell's voice was the epitome of serious. These were the screams of his soul.

"No matter how I tried to save the empire's people, it was all futile! The reason I kept winning when I went out to the battlefield was all for this day. None of it was my own power! Not a single bit of my life's effort has had any impact on this world! For the sake of that man... for that sort of man, can you imagine how many humans have suffered!? Doesn't it irritate you!?"

Looking at the prince before his eyes, Rudel thought.

(What is he talking about?)

It was a simple, honest question. And he understood the answer.

"I see, so you made it Aleist's fault that things aren't going your way. Good for you, you found an excuse."

Askewell's eyes opened wide. A vein surfaced on his forehead. In rage and surprise towards Rudel's words. His face was one of all sorts of emotions swirling about.

"You want me to sympathize? I'll do plenty of that once this battle is over. So... die."

When Rudel directed his right arm at Aleist, the black smoke manifested a number of offensive shields around Askewell. Those spiked shields closed in from around as if to crush him whole.

"I see... when you made your dream come true, I..."

Those several hundred large shields crushed Askewell and exploded. His hair ruffled out of place by the blast wave, Rudel narrowed his eyes as he looked at Askewell.

“If you’ll let me have my say, you’re the unreasonable one here.”

At the end of Rudel’s slightly envious expression, was the form of Askewell riding the back of the dark dragon. And now the form it took on was terribly reminiscent of Sakuya’s. A purple halo floating behind its back, six wings, and four large limbs.

The differences that stood out were its aggressive, barbed scales and the look in its eyes.

(... I want to ride it a bit.)

From the point of view of one who had desperately become a dragoon, he had a complaint or two for Askewell, who had mimicked one at the drop of a hat.

Even if he was barking up the wrong tree.

The dark dragon opened its mouth.

‘Don’t think this makes us equal. We surpass you on all fronts. In order to restore these glaring errors, the more your abnormality increases, the stronger we become.’

Rudel folded his arms.

‘I see, so you don’t start out almighty. Then there are ways to go about it.’

Izumi wondered if the calm and collected Rudel had some ingenious idea.

“You have a plan?”

But Rudel offered an immediate reply.

“None! But since it’s come to this, there’s no choice but to grow stronger than we are now. If we do that, we can surpass our enemy.”

Izumi breathed a sigh.

“You heard it, if you get stronger, they’ll also—”

“Then I’ll surpass what comes next. You worry too much... I’m quite used to fighting guys stronger than me.”

As Rudel made a smile, Izumi shut her mouth. She looked in the direction of the dark dragon and Askewell. Gripping the hilt of her katana.

“Got it. I’ll try to help out. I have to make myself at least a little useful.”

Rudel laughed aloud.

“That makes it three against two! It’s our win.”



On the ground, the Kingdom of Courtois fought the imperial army under Chlust’s command. With Aleist fighting on the frontmost lines, they barely managed to hold out without crumbling.

That was the most they could do. A gathering of odds and ends, the Courtois army had no coordination. Even if some was established, before the empire’s trained troops, it was a last-second veneer.

“Keep everything down to the basics. That’s all we can do!”

Chlust issued simple orders. With the quality of the gathered soldiers all over the place, they had to keep their objectives to the absolute basics.

The army moving especially poorly belonged to the Arses House.

Having not done any decent training, they had become a deadweight.

(If the black knight and his elites weren’t here, we’d be screwed.)

Looking up in the sky, two water dragons intercepted the wyverns raining down on them.

They were fighting so they couldn’t bring casualties to the ground troops, and none were to die to stray shots from above. However, because of that, their forces had mixed into a muddled mess with the imperial. This prevented them from receiving dragoon support.

Chlust had been driven off to the outskirts, and there he had learned how to command. Yet when an army far too large was placed under his command, his panic began to show.

“The dragoons will protect the sky! We’re going to do our part!”

At the same time, he thought.

(To think the empire’s training would be on this level.)

In one on one, the imperial army surpassed Courtois. They could only fight because they had the black knight. Additionally, the soldiers of the imperial army fought almost as if they were walking death row.

As the fight devolved into a chaotic melee, the dragons couldn’t attack. With that in mind, compared to fighting the dragons up high, the Courtoan soldiers before their eyes weren’t scary in the slightest.

And they couldn’t pull back.

They really were dead men walking.

“... Brother, we won’t hold out much longer.”

Regardless of the grudge he held towards his brother who shoved command onto him, Chlust could only do what he was capable of.



“Take that!”

Swinging two swords from his horse, cutting down streams of imperial knights and soldiers, Aleist was terribly stained with the blood spurt.

The gora disappeared into black smoke, while Askewell had fled into the sky.

He had no means to give chase, and so he fought on the ground. But these crazed soldiers were cornering him into a close fight. While his harem members were strong, they were flinching before the enemy’s death-driven insanity.

“Should they usually withdraw after incurring casualties this high!?”

More than twenty percent of the whole. The imperial army’s casualty figures had long since exceeded that, but he couldn’t discern any signs of retreat.

More so, these were soldiers who’d lost anywhere to run to.

While the tides were already in Courtois’ favor, even so, the rate things were going would leave tremendous casualties on both sides.

As Aleist helped out his allies while gathering enemies towards himself, a giant white mass approached from the sky.

It was Sakuya.

“... Wait a tic.”

Falling towards the battlefield, there were traces of burns on her surface. A heavy gray cloud swirled a spiral, and from it, a black dragon resembling Sakuya slowly showed itself.

“Kuh!”

Racing his trusty steed Heath, Aleist tried to part from the course of Sakuya’s fall when he caught a glimpse of a flash of light.

The one who fell from the sky was Izumi, holding her Katana.

“Izumi-san!”

Izumi looked at the ground, prepared to draw her blade, and in one flash—

“Hah!”

Slashing up the imperial soldiers around Aleist, she landed out of breath before looking at the sky.

Aleist got down from his horse to hear out the situation.

“What the hell happened up there!?”

Izumi responded at once. Wiping off the grime on her face, she explained the fight in the air.

“Seven times.”

“Seven what?”

“... Rudel and Sakuya, and myself managed to corner that black dragon seven times. But every time, that thing just revives stronger than before. It’s getting beyond our ability to cope.”

Both armies took distance from where Sakuya fell. While that brought a temporary ceasefire, a look at the sky revealed the black malign dragon looking down over them. On its head, Askewell was also visible.

He wore sinister armor, equipped with a lance, his arms folded.

As Sakuya fell, in order to support her from below, Rudel made a great many shields of life, killing her momentum before she landed.

“Rudel!”

While Aleist called out, Rudel seemed considerably vexed.

He heard a voice from on high.

“You did splendid to hold out so long. But this is the end. Once I defeat you, the world will finally be free of your influence.”

Askewell’s bitter expression was directed at Aleist.

Renewing his grip on both his swords, Aleist grimaced. Come so far, would they really fall short?

(It’s my fault... then I should be the one to settle it...)

He would protect his comrades, even if it cost him his life. It happened the moment he thought that.

Slowly standing Sakuya’s massive body, Rudel came over to him. His expression was straightforward to no end—

“As you can see, there’s nothing I can do to take that thing down on my own. Aleist, you’re coming with me. The two of us and Sakuya will kill it.”

Aleist flew into a confusion.

“... Eh? Say what you want, but I have no idea what to do.”

“No worries, no problem. For now, just lend a hand. It’s a bothersome one that immediately revives when you’ve almost got it. I’d love to blow it away before it restores itself, but I’m lacking in firepower.”

For the Rudel-Sakuya combo to have insufficient firepower? From Aleist’s point of view, that was a nightmare. Even with his help, he started to think when.

“Hey, let’s get going. Izumi, I’m sorry, but could you go help out Chlust? I’m going to push my limits a bit, so I wouldn’t recommend riding with me any further.”



Izumi shrugged her shoulders.

“That so? That’s a shame.”

Looking up, Sakuya’s palms were approaching the two of them. With a skillful grip, Sakuya boarded Rudel and Aleist on her back.



Once Rudel was on Sakuya’s back once more, he looked up at the dark dragon alongside Aleist.

“Just a little more to go. When there was just a little left, it restored itself seven times.”

Seeing an irritated Rudel, Aleist shook his head to the side.

“I get that, but it would be troublesome for you to rely on me here. All I can do is control shadows, that sort of thing. To clear things up, I don’t have unlimited mana reserves anymore!”

Rudel directed Aleist a smile.

“Yeah, no problem. When I was dead, Sakuya told me. You won’t lose what you’ve cultivated yourself. And if it’s mana you’re looking for, Sakuya’s got it.”

Rudel looked down at Sakuya and smiled.

“By Sakuya, you mean the goddess, don’t you? To think she’d be waiting at death’s door for you, well how should I put it... no, doesn’t really matter.”

As he slowly raised his head, the dark dragon emitted a stream of wyverns out of his body. That scene was a nightmare in itself.

“Is it not landing a finishing blow because it’s got the leisure?”

Aleist thought the enemy was trying to belittle them, though Rudel begged to differ.

“I wonder. If it had leisure, it would have come to finish us off by now. Perhaps its been weakened so far it’s unable to.”

Sakuya slowly spread her wings and roared, while Rudel felt out the flow of mana in her body.

“Aleist, try manipulating Sakuya’s mana. If you just change it up a bit and form the shape, Sakuya will go and do something.”

Despite his confusion, Aleist leaned over and stroked Sakuya’s back.

“Now that’s arbitrary. Whatever happens, don’t blame me.”

As Rudel and Aleist touched Sakuya’s back, white and black symbols surfaced over her body as mana raced across its surface. The two of them stood, and Rudel’s right hand. Aleist’s left hand. After the two formed fists to bump with one another, Sakuya flapped her large wings and rose into the sky.

The halo appeared behind her back again.

While the golden armor manifested to protect her, this time that wasn’t all. Her third pair of wings formed, and from both shoulders, a new set of arms emerged.

Black, and protected in golden armor, those arms gripped weapons of gold.

And as the wyverns approached Sakuya, hundreds of snake heads emerged from the exposed skin of those arms to bite into them and tear them apart.

“That’s new. Looks like you get an autonomous intercept.”

Ignoring Rudel’s delight, Aleist looked around somewhat perplexed.

“Isn’t that a bit creepy? No, I get I’m the one who made it, but how to put it...”

As Sakuya rose to the same height as the dark dragon, the two sides exchanged a glare. Askewell looked at Rudel and Aleist, pointing the tip of his spear.

“It’s the same no matter how many times you stand. There is no victory for you.”

More than a hundred wyverns had already manifested around the dragon once more, and the battles on the ground had already resumed.

Within that, Rudel.

“Pretty much everyone’s told me it’s impossible too many times to count, but here I am. And how many times have you said those words? I’m starting to lose

trust in them.”

Rudel’s words put Aleist into a panic.

“Could you please stop riling up your opponents just this once?”

The thick clouds drew a spiral, the lightning letting off light and sound. On the battlefield where the rain was about to fall, Rudel looked to the sky.

“... And also. You’ve wasted too much time.”

Turning to Askewell, as if proclaiming his own victory, Rudel pointed at the sky.

Wild dragons shot out from the clouds one after the next, having finished exterminating wyverns, and come over to help.

Askewell’s brow twitched.

“If that’s all the help you’ve rallied, then—”

Rudel smiled.

“No, that’s not all. That’s not all, prince of the empire!”

In addition to the wild dragons, gray dragons with dragoons on their backs entered the stage. Even the dragoons had arrived.

Aleist looked at the ground.

“There are allies below as well...even father.”

Starting with Aleist’s home, the Hardie house, the armies of various regions were gathering.

Rudel urged Askewell to surrender.

“... It’s over. The fact our allies have arrived means we have reigned triumphant on the other battlefield. There is no victory for you. Surrender.”

At the point the dragoons came as relief. Rudel could see their victory was secured on the other field. As a matter of fact, that was precisely the case.

However, Askewell wrung out his voice.

“Not yet. It’s not over yet. I’m right here. Victory to the empire... for the empire’s future, I shall hold victory in these hands!”

Rudel turned to Askewell with a slight mutter.

“I see, that’s unfortunate.”

On Sakuya’s roar, Rudel and Aleist lowered their hips. Sakuya and the dark dragon smashed into one another, the shock wave raising a wind around.

With the two closing in the distance, Askewell jumped over to Sakuya’s back, making his way towards her riders.

Rudel with his sword and shield.

Aleist readied his twin blades, and on Sakuya’s back, their weapons met.

“— I’ll make this the end.”

As Rudel said so, Askewell grit his teeth.

“I’ll be the one ending it. This bad joke of a destiny—and my fate with you two!”

## Chapter 164: Last Battle

By the collision of Sakuya and the dark dragon, the sun's light pierced through the battlefield covered in thick clouds.

Neither side could pull back. On that bog of a battlefield, Eunius rushed over to Luecke. The reason being, the enemy had begun to amass around Luecke's forces.

Issuing orders from the center of a magic formation, he seemed to be carrying out some form of preparations.

"What the hell's so important you'd isolate yourself away to do it!? The enemy's at your doorstep!"

Without turning his face to Eunius' yell, taking notes and calculating something out, Luecke indifferently answered.

"This magic formation is anti-dragon. I'm going to use it."

Recycling the formation the enemy had been using, he would help out Rudel and Aleist. Luecke earnestly carried out his calculations.

Eunius thought.

(No use talking to him. But will this guy's troops hold out?)

The enemy on their last stand, they stood in unity charging straight forward without knowing retreat. Luecke's army detached from the main force was nothing more than an easy target for them.

It was partly due to their lack of a proper offensive that they were trying to reuse their circle in the first place.

The empire's soldiers were strong. Eunius recalled his own honest impression as he gave up on persuading this idiot of a friend.

"... No way around it. I'll buy you some time. How long do I have to hold out?"

Hearing Eunius' voice, Luecke's memo taking hand stopped for a brief moment. Once it had resumed, he made his request.

“... One hour. If we use it once, the enemy will see it coming the next time, so it'll be a one-time thing. But that alone should be plenty for Rudel up there.”

Eunius turned Luecke his back and walked off.

“Then I'll protect you while you get on with this thing. If the time comes, I'll drag you away whether you like it or not, remember that.”

“Thanks,” came a small voice from Luecke.



Her body draped in golden armor, with two new black arms, Sakuya exchanged blows with the dark dragon.

The black arms gripped golden weapons, its right hand the white knight's sword, its left hand the black knight's. Two golden shields floated to protect her, fending off the dragon's fists.

The two grappled, they punched, they cut at one another and exchanged dragon breath. The attacks from these two giants generated massive shockwaves, and in no time at all, the surrounding clouds had almost all been blown off, giving way to a blue sky.

The dark dragon bit into Sakuya's neck. Each and every one of its sharp fangs concealed power greater than a magic sword fashioned to slay dragons.

Opening her mouth in a scream, Sakuya hammered a body blow into the dragon's stomach. A stroke from her thick arms caused cracks to race across the dark dragon's tough skin.

Writhing in pain, the dragon's mouth wretched open as it parted from Sakuya's neck. Before it could get away, Sakuya lowered the golden sword at its head.

While the dragon immediately took evasive action, Sakuya grabbed it with both arms to hold it in place. By turning its head to one side, it contained its injuries at a portion of its horn and one eye.

‘Nggh, my wounds aren't healing. Why!?’

Even as blood dripped down her nape, Sakuya offered the dragon an answer.

‘Sakuya’s power is being drawn out by Rudel and Aleist. So she won’t lose. Sakuya is strong!’

Young. Terribly young, yet Sakuya gave off the will to never lose.

Spreading its remaining eye wide, the dark dragon opened its large mouth to roar.

‘You sham lizard! When you’re merely a cobbling of sham odds and end, who do you think you’re biting back at!?’

The dragon who would call Sakuya a sham went right on to drive a breath into her. Yet the black and red muddled mana gathering in its mouth found itself bisected by a sword of light, exploding before release.

There stood the enraged form of Rudel.

“Bastard! You got something to say about my Sakuya!? Very well, I’ll answer that deathwish!”

Spitting smoke from its mouth, the dark dragon cried out Askewell’s name.

‘Askewell! What are you doing? Kill him already!’

Sakuya and the dragon. Using both airborne beasts as footing, Rudel, Aleist and Askewell fought.

But Askewell found himself held up by Aleist.

“What do you think I’m doing!? If only, if only you didn’t exist!”

A wrinkle gracing his brow, Askewell swung his lance with the face of a demon. Shockwaves and magic emitted with each revolution before the point abruptly shot towards Aleist.

But Aleist turned it aside with a magic sword, and with his other sword, he cut at his foe. Askewell sacrificed his left arm to take the attack. While the blade cut deep into his flesh, it stopped just short of lopping the limb off.

However, Aleist was a dual blade user, and in the moment Askewell’s attention was occupied, he immediately used his other sword to inflict a followup blow on his stomach.

“Kuh!”

He didn't bleed. Askewell's body swiftly regenerated, but without faltering, Aleist kept up an offense.

"Rudel! Help out here too! The most I can do is hold him in place!"

And yet, Aleist let out a pathetic voice. It only served to rub Askewell the wrong way.

Askewell forcefully swung his spear to knock Aleist back. But using that intent to take distance, Aleist produced a stream of spears from his own shadow, sending them flying towards him.

While Askewell easily hit them all down, those black spears burst, emitting a smoke that stole away his vision. In that opening, Rudel cut down from above.

Despite him catching it with his spear, Rudel's strike with all his weight behind it bisected the shaft, carving deep from Askewell's right shoulder to his abdomen.

Seeing that, Rudel offered a word.

"Even that won't do it."

Not shedding a drop of blood, Askewell's body had already begun restoring itself, causing Rudel to take distance. With a large lurch of the dark dragon he was using as footing, Askewell's stance was thrown a bit off.

"What are you doing!?"

Askewell grew irritated, however, they were in the sky... with uncertain footing, and the stage being atop a dragon's back, every aspect favored the dragoon.

Without a moment's delay, Rudel cut again, and Askewell's leg soared through the sky. Following on, having recovered his footing, Aleist cut in to finish the job with his arm.

Thrown into freefall, Askewell attempted to float on his own while regenerating his body. But right before his eyes came the white approaching fist of a dragon.

"What non—"



He was likely about to question the nonsensical nature of coincidence. But to the dragoons who could communicate telepathically, the knight and dragon existed as a set, and their coordination was to be expected.

Smacked, sent flying, with a large portion of his body crushed, while Askewell continued falling, his body was still regenerating. His healing was gradually growing slower.

“Why. Why are you—”

His body back in order, Askewell stood on the battlefield once more. Against Rudel and Aleist, a battle of numeric inferiority.



On the ground, Eunius was pushed into a close fight to protect Luecke.

“Don’t let a single one through!”

Swinging down his greatsword, he cut aside an imperial soldier as he cried out; his surrounding subordinates wrung out their voices in response.

A battlefield over which flew mud, flew iron, flew blood, and flew flesh, this truly was a hell on earth. The imperial soldiers pushing in on them wave after wave were driven mad by the fear of inevitable death.

Believing in Luecke, Eunius would protect this point to his last breath, swinging his sword. Before his eyes, a knight-looking man stepped out front.

A glance was enough to know he was strong. Swinging about a large hammer, he mowed away allies as he charged towards Eunius.

“So you’re their commander!”

Eunius laughed at the enemy knight’s words.

“And what if I am!?”

Magic sword. A swing with all his weight and might, the enemy was split in two-hammer and all-no longer able to move. Eunius gasped for breath as he looked forward.

No matter how low their numbers fell, the imperials would even climb over their friends’ corpses to grit their teeth and press on.

“Just surrender already!”

Swiping his great sword to the side, he sliced down another when an impact rang out behind him. Both friend and foe turned an eye towards it.

“What now!?”

“Did Courtois do something!?”

“That light it—”

Behind Eunius’ forces, a light broke out from the magic formation Luecke had been working on.

“The bastard really did it!”

Believing in Luecke’s success, Eunius issued a manifesto to his troops!

“One final push! If we overcome this, it will be our Courtois’ victory!”

A war cry resounding across the battlefield, and the intense collision of two camps.



In the center of the magic circle, Luecke stationed shield knights over various places in and out of it as he looked to the sky.

Light flooded up from the formation, amplifying his magic even further.

A look up to two dragons fighting in the distance.

With a magic called farsight, Luecke confirmed his foe’s positioning before nodding. Vargas sent over a shout.

“Young master, this shield’s at its limit!”

Luecke laughed.

“Vargas, don’t call me that! But this is the end. Rudel, you’d better not waste my aid... my and Eunius’ aid.”

Hoisting his right arm high, when he snapped his finger, an orb of light formed above the formation. With fire, water, wind, lightning, earth attribute magic revolving around it, the round was fired into the sky towards the dark dragon.

After seeing it off, Luecke collapsed at the knees. The light vanished from the

circle, Vargas rushed over to him.

“Oy, Luecke!”

With Vargas calling him what he once had before, Luecke smiled.

“You fool. I’m your employer, Vargas. But not bad... Vargas, we’re going to help out Eunius.”

Forcing himself to his feet, Luecke issued out orders to send reinforcements to Eunius.



Rudel clanked down from the sky.

He was in the midst of cutting at Askewell when he noticed something was fired from below. He immediately identified it.

Perhaps it could be called instinct, or perhaps one might say he could trace the thoughts of his close friend from his school days... he understood help was on the way.

“Luecke! I owe you one!”

Rudel’s words greatly irritated Askewell.

“Don’t look away on the battle—”

Rudel kicked Askewell away as he collected up Aleist, making a dash for Sakuya’s shoulder as he cried out.

“Sakuya, get back!”

Sakuya immediately followed his orders to take distance from the dark dragon. The wound-ridden dragon and Askewell thought to use this chance to heal their wounds—

‘What!?’

“From below!?”

A little late to notice the lights encroaching on them from below, they shifted to evasive action. However, the light went right on to capture the dragon, the mana within it exploding, wrapping the prince and dragon in a blazing inferno. Immediately after, water broke out to drown them, and electricity after that.

A harsh wind blew, trapping the two in a storm, and finally large rocks mixed in with the gale smashing into them.

To Rudel's side, Aleist watched over the scene, reeling back somewhat.

"I'm surprised they're enduring that one."

Aleist was tattered too. A portion of his armor had been blown off, he was covered in wounds with blood dripping down his face as well.

Rudel wasn't much better. Wound-ridden, his shield dented, chips running down his sword.

Rudel took in the surrounding circumstance and determined now was the change to seize victory.

Holding out his left hand, he gripped his fist.

"... Aleist, the next one will decide."

His serious voice compelled Aleist to nod.

"Got it. I'll bet my all on this. We've made it this far. With everything I've got left— huh! What!? Whaaat!?"

Aleist's surprise was justified. Sakuya suddenly grasped the two riding on her shoulders. Rudel in her right hand, Aleist in her left, she prepared for the next step.

Aleist cried out hysterically.

"Wait! I can see where this is going, but don't tell me!"

Rudel laughed.

"You're quick on the uptake. That's right... Sakuya's going to give us a boost. Wager it all on this one blow, Aleist."

Sticking up his thumb, Rudel directed Aleist a smile. In the gaps between her fingers, Aleist hung his head, letting out a dry laugh.

"Aha, ahahahah... goddammit! Let's do this shit!"

The two of them had made their resolve just as the magic bolt from the ground faded out.

Askewell and the dark dragon released from it were covered in wounds, their regeneration wouldn't make it in time.

"Sakuya... chuck us."

'Yeah!'

Rudel flowed magic into his sword and shield. He poured in the techniques he had forged to that point. As he imbued his armaments with magic, the light waved and flickered like a flame. A wind blew around him, swaying the flames even more.

Aleist similarly flooded his two swords with magic.

His inexhaustible mana was long gone. What he had was what he had cultivated himself, Aleist's own mana. That which Aleist could shape however he liked coursed through his two swords like black lightning.

With their preparations in order, Sakuya swung both her arms at once, throwing them towards the dark dragon.

The dragon roared, Askewell emitted mana from all over his body.

While they readied themselves to intercept, Rudel made for the dragon, Aleist to Askewell, both on a complete offensive.

"This is—"

"— The end!!"

The dragon's roar shifted into a breath aimed at Rudel, yet from right within its stream, Rudel blocked the damage with his shield as he pressed on. He extended the blade of the sword in his right hand, and cut at the dragon.

'If only, if only you didn't exist!!'

Askewell put every ounce of his being into facing Aleist. Sparks flew as his spear met with Aleist's crossed swords.

"This world went mad because of you... it's you, it's all your fault!"

Hearing Askewell's words now, Aleist no longer had any hesitation.

"I do feel guilty. But, even so... I want to press onwards with my friends! I decided we're all moving forward together!"

As Askewell heard Aleist's words, his power softened. Aleist's swords tore through his spear and then him.

As the two of them were thrown into the air, Rudel used his air movement to collect Aleist. Returning his sword to his sheath, he directed his right hand at Askewell and the dragon.

Aleist looked over the scene in awe.

"So many dragons..."

Enclosing the dark dragon and Askewell, the dragoons and dragons were stationed, their mouths at the ready to fire their breath.

Sakuya was also at the ready, and with Rudel clenching his open palm as the signal, each and every dragon opened fire at once.

"Not even ash will remain. Rest in peace."

With Rudel's whisper, the dragon and Askewell disappeared into the light.

Only Askewell's severed torso fell towards the ground.

While they wanted to chase after it, both Rudel and Aleist were close to their limit. In the midst of their fall, Sakuya gently caught them, the gold armor and black arms having faded away.

'Rudel, it's getting quiet down there.'

'... So we really did it. The fatigue's kicking in.'

Rudel said and closed his eyes in Sakuya's hand.



Askewell lay battered on the ground. What had regenerated of his body was mere human flesh.

Opening his eyes, he saw Mies and his subordinates nearby.

"Askewell-sama! I-I'll get a doctor at once. So get a grip—"

But while his surface wounds had closed, he couldn't say the same for underneath. Askewell could sense his own death wasn't far off.

This had to be the compensation for borrowing that black existence's power

and overexerting himself.

(I see, so this is where I end.)

Askewell grasped Mies' arm. To Mies' surprise, he squeezed out a faint voice.

"Mies... t-the responsibility for this war... is mine."

"Please don't talk, Askewell-sama!"

Spitting up blood, Askewell continued on.

"I-I have to. Someone has to take responsibility. Otherwise... even more chaos..."

Askewell knew of the empire's exhaustion. He knew they needed an existence to smash their discontentment into. It would soften their hatred, if only slightly. And he thought over what he was capable of as he was now.

"Y-you just have to take me to the empire. This life will finally find its meaning on the gallows... so... so, take me to the empire. There, before its people..."

As he went on coughing blood, Mies wept.

"Let's run, Askewell-sama. If it's just a few of us, we'll be able to keep low."

"We can't! That won't work, Mies... I'm begging you. Please."

Breaking into tears, Askewell wished for an end executed by the empire. As the big bad who impoverished and brought ruin to the country, he would become the existence for them to alleviate their hatred.

(I see, so I ran away... this all happened because I gave up on my dreams and ran here.)

Askewell spoke.

"Mies, there are rooms full of research material at my manner. They're all on agriculture: nothing but failures, but I'd be happy if you made some use out of them. I won't say it's for the empire's sake anymore. The empire will eventually fall apart. But for the future... please."

Mies gripped Askewell's hand, and shedding tears, she nodded. With a warm smile at her, he gave the order for his own capture and a retreat back to the empire.



Izumi looked at the retreating imperial army.

Courtois was too exhausted to give pursuit.

Chlust looked up at the sky.

“My brother’s coming back. You should go to him.”

“you have my gratitude!”

Of the dragons descending to the ground with teetering feet, Izumi picked out the single white dragon among them.

Sakuya slowly descended, gently placing Rudel and Aleist on the ground. As soon as she saw him, Izumi jumped right at him.

Similarly, Aleist’s harem members crowded around Aleist. It looked as if Aleist was going to be crushed.

Perhaps he could no longer speak, as Aleist could only entrust his body to the female members.

Izumi embraced Rudel.

“... You keep pushing yourself. You’re wounded again.”

As Izumi said that, Rudel opened his eyes ever-so-slightly and smiled.

“My bad. But I feel somewhat pleasant.”

“... Rudel?”

Upon seeing a smiling Rudel, Izumi grew worried.

“You finally overcame it.”

Her voice was shaking.

“Yeah, so I have to work hard from here on.”

Rudel reached his hand towards Izumi’s face.

“You know... I’ve been thinking.”

“About what?”

“My achievements this time... I think I’d like you as a reward. If Chlust can do



a good job with the Arses House, I think I'll confess my feelings to you."

Rudel's hand brushed up against her face. She gripped it.

"Yeah, and I'll accept them. I'll always accept them, so..."

Rudel smiled.

"That's great. Then I have to think of the right words to propose... I'll consult with Eunius or Luecke... do you think Aleist will do?"

Rudel's voice turned just a bit dubious. Izumi spoke in jest.

"I don't know about those three. Rudel, how about you think something up? I won't be surprised no matter how off-beat it is. So..."

As Izumi shed tears, Rudel wiped one away with his fingers.

"I'll get thinking... don't get mad if I fail."

Rudel closed his eyes.

"I won't be mad! So... so stay with me!"

Rudel took just one deep breath.

"Yeah, now that the relief's set in..."

Rudel's hand slipped out of Izumi's and fell to the ground. Izumi bawled out her voice as around, starting with Bennet, a great many individuals surrounded Rudel.

Every closed their eyes to offer a silent prayer.

## Chapter 165: You're There, and I'm Here

Aleist had lost consciousness at some point.

In a deep sensation as if his body wasn't his own, he heard a voice. A voice he knew, it was the voice of the existence who sent him to the world he was now.

Thinking back on it, he was extremely embarrassed by how he was back then.

'Did you have fun in the world you wished for?'

Were those words cynicism, or honest curiosity?

Aleist couldn't tell, but he spoke honest as could be.

"It was fun, no I mean, it is and will be fun. They accepted me even as I am after all. Back then... for sending me to this world, truly, thank you."

When he reincarnated, Aleist wished for status, for power, for everything. Yet when he was supposed to have obtained it all, he hadn't obtained a thing.

"I made friends. I never thought I'd be friends with the side character Rudel. When he was just supposed to be a stepping stone support role, he longed to ride dragons, grew earnest, put his all into each and every day... he was a really radiant existence. I'm the one who ended up the stepping stone side character."

It was as if their roles were reversed. But the moment he accepted that, Aleist felt he had matured quite a bit.

"I never mastered the cheat you gave me, and yet I went and traded it off... sorry about that."

The voice sounded somewhat amused.

It must have been considerably pleased with Aleist's answer.

'It's a power I gave you. Use it however you want. However, I never thought you'd let go of it at the end. You surpassed my expectations, and so too did he. It all stemmed from but a single incident. That unplanned action rewrote everything.'

Action? As Aleist grew curious, the voice spoke.

‘A boy pleaded to his parents to see a dragon on his birthday. His parents heard his wish, and a single dragon that was never to take flight soared through the sky... the one who witnessed it was Rudel.’

A surprise indeed.

“Ahahah, then I’d very much like to thank that boy. Otherwise, who knows where I’d be around now.”

The voice spoke gently.

‘Did your real wish come true?’

Aleist spoke strongly and clearly.

“It has.”

There, the voice told of a world to come.

‘The world was nothing more than a reproduction of a game. I can’t guarantee what happens after the game’s been cleared. You’ll have to manage. No visible fate, no existences to get in your way. Whether things get better or worse is all up to you.’

Aleist was hard-pressed for words. There was something he had to ask no matter what.

“Umm, did this world distort because of me?”

The voice plainly informed him.

‘That’s right. But if it weren’t for you, this world wouldn’t even have existed. I’ll leave the rest to you and your friends. This is the most fun I’ve had in a while.’

After it had said that, the voice really did fade into the distance. Aleist could clearly tell. And at the end.

“... Thank you.”

He gave his thanks.



Aleist opened his eyes. He was in a place he recognized all too well, a sickroom he often used in his years as a student.

“... Huh?”

When he looked around, the usual suspects lay on the other beds, their bodies wrapped in bandages. Rudel alone, a red mark on his face... he had the traces of a slap.

Aleist was distraught.

(D-don't tell me I went back in time!? I mean, this is the academy, and there's Izumi-san next to Rudel, and... h-huh!?)

While Aleist wondered if he had been turned into a time traveler this time, Luecke explained from the bed beside him.

“What are you so surprised about? There were so many injured parties, that we were carted around and pushed into any available facility. Good grief, I never thought I'd be in this room's care after graduation.”

Eunius meanwhile yawned.

“Let's just take it easy. Rudel's little brother can take care of cleaning up. Rather, that Clust kid's got talent. Rallying together such numbers, and even leading them to victory.”

Chlust's evaluation was on the rise. Aleist looked at Izumi bashfully peeling fruit.

Rudel hung his head in shame.

“Hey, what happened?”

Luecke looked at Rudel and Izumi. Touching a finger to his forehead, he breathed a sigh.

“That Rudel, it seems he barely got any sleep before the battle. So after it was over... he said something misleading, and fell asleep in the most misleading way.”

Rudel had fought alone, day after day through the waves of marching imperials. The effects of his sleep deprivation had him out cold the moment he

loosened up.

That ha invited in misunderstandings galore, and apparently Izumi had tears in her eyes as she slapped him. Of course, only after he was healed and had opened his eyes.

Eunius laughed.

“I hear everyone gathered around and gave him a moment of silence. At the center of it, ‘He’s just sleeping, okay!’ Izumi was screaming with her face all red.”

Luecke spat out his words.

“Good grief, what a troublesome guy.”

Aleist looked at Rudel. Rudel was apologizing to Izumi.

“Izumi, please hear me out. Even I have my limits.”

With her face bright red, Izumi shoved a fruit slice into Rudel’s mouth. After chewing and swallowing, Rudel went on.

“I’m sorry. I apologize.”

But perhaps that wasn’t enough, as she shoved another fruit into his mouth. Upon seeing that,

“Maybe I should get a girlfriend,”

Eunius said. Luecke sighed.

“Not you too. Good grief, when I’m still suffering from my failed confession.”

Aleist was somewhat surprised. He thought things were going well enough with Lena.

“Really? She turned you down?”

Eunius immediately yelled at Aleist.

“You fool, don’t touch that one!”

Luecke grinned as he began detailing the circumstance.

“Well now, the truth is, after that, I went over to Lena to confess. I carefully chose out all my words and was going to convey my feelings... but before that,

‘Luecke-san, I like you,’ she told me. My proposal was a complete failure.”

Eunius made a reluctant face at Aleist.

“Aaah, this is going to drag on. Aleist, you take responsibility and listen. He goes on for about two hours. And wait, I can only imagine he’s lying when he says he was confessed to instead, dammit.”

Luecke turned Eunius a smile.

“Hey now, Lena just guessed what was going on when I was trying to set a mood and squeeze out my voice. It was definitely my failing, but it’s true she confessed to me. Don’t be jealous.”

Aleist thought.

(... What is it, this hazy feeling. When Millia is still avoiding me...)

It was at that moment Millia dropped by the sickroom.

“Is everyone doing well? Oh, Aleist you’re up. That’s good.”

Millia looked at Aleist with a smile. With that alone, Aleist found happiness.

(Aah, Millia really is my goddess.)

His heart momentarily ruled by envy cleared to blue skies. Meanwhile, with fruit shoved in his mouth one after the next, Rudel was nearing his limit.

“If you’re well, you’re up for a meeting.”

“Meeting?”

On Millia’s beckoning, wearing a tiara and a garb more extravagant than usual, Fina Courtois entered the room.

Aleist’s honest impression,

(Oh right, she was a princess or something.)

His impression of her as a junior at the academy was too strong, he was prone to forgetting. It was also a problem that Aleist himself was so bothered by other things he didn’t pay much attention to Fina.

Rudel’s eyes sparkled as he looked at Fina. Surely this would end Izumi’s wrath, even temporarily.

Fina grasped the hem of her skirt, deeply lowering her head.

“As a representative of Courtois, I would like to express our thanks for everyone’s work on this occasion.”

Hearing that, Luecke’s and Eunius’ faces turned serious. Rudel was the same. Aleist alone didn’t notice.

With Fina before him, Rudel climbed off the bed onto his knees. Both Luecke and Eunius followed Suit, and Aleist barely managed to copy.

But Fina stopped them with a hand.

“We are not in an official space.”

Rudel spoke as representative.

“Would it be in order to address you as Her Majesty, the Queen?”

Fina shook her head to the side.

“That is still a work in process. In that regard, my master... pardon. Rudel-dono, I have a request to make of you.”

Rudel lowered his head.

“Yes, say the word.”

Aleist thought.

(I see, if she’s representing the country, that means the second princess is becoming queen? That’s different from the game... no, this is already a different world.)

Fina spread out her hand.

“I alone am insufficient to reconstruct our dear country. Won’t you shoulder that weight with me? Courtois had prepared a seat on the throne for Rudel Arses.”

Aleist honestly rejoiced at Rudel becoming King, but it was there he noticed.

(Huh? Wait a second. If you say that to Rudel...)

Rudel raised his face and smiled.

“I refused. I am but a lowly dragoon. As a single knight, I swear to my heart I

shall continue to support 'Her Majesty the Queen'. There are those far more worthy than I."

Saying that, Rudel sent a look around. Before anyone could move, Eunius stood and declared.

"I, Eunius Diade! Swear it on my sword to cut down the enemies of her majesty!"

And Luecke stood as well.

Aleist thought.

(Crap! I'm too late!!)

"I, Luecke Halbades devote an oath of loyalty to her royal highness."

A rattling sound from the doorway, King Albach made his appearance in a wheelchair. The one pushing the char was Sophina.

"W-wait. Boys, wait a second. Then what is it? ... You'll decline the position of King!?"

Fina had frozen in place expressionless.

Rudel, Eunius and Luecke were all looking at Aleist.

"... Aleist, I believe in you."

"Aleist, I ain't gonna complain if you rise to power."

"Yeah, you have my full support."

The three of them shoved the throne on him with wonderful smiles.

Aleist shouted.

"Wait a second! I mean, it's King, right!? Wouldn't you want that, normally!?"

Rudel averted his eyes as he spoke.

"O-of course. But I'm not worthy... and so, fare thee well!"

Suddenly sprinting off, Rudel hoisted Izumi over his shoulder and jumped out the window. With Sakuya retrieving him outside, he achieved a perfect escape.

Eunius shouted.

"The bastard got away! Umm, as my first duty to her majesty, I shall chase



him down!”

Luecke also jumped aboard the ship.

“And I as well. Good grief, what is that man thinking?”

When the two of them were gone, a dubious air enveloped the sickroom. Albach silently gazed at Aleist.

Aleist looked at Millia. But she turned away his gaze.

Fina sat on the spot, expressionlessly muttering...

“Master, you idiot. I laid all the groundwork, but it’s because sister stirred everything up that it wasn’t perfect yet... now that it’s come to this, I’ll make it an established truth whether you like it or not... no, perhaps I can even fabricate it. I mean, I’m queen. I am the law.”

Aleist looked at her and thought.

“Huh? What!? Is it just me, or is this kid saying some scary things!?”

Albach opened his mouth.

“Aleist-kun... you won’t run, right?”

Aleist stood, he took a step back.

(No way. With kingship and such, isn’t that normally a position you’d even spill blood to reach!? Why did they all run!?)

With a bitter smile, Aleist slowly retreated further. The door forcefully burst open with the entrance of his harem members.

“Aleist-sama!?”

Faaaai!

To his surprise, the group had clearly grown in numbers since he last saw them.

“Aleist-sama, we’ve come to a conclusion!”

“D-did you now?”

(I see, so they’ve finally lost interest in me—)

We don't mind if we're not your number one. So please, keep us by your side! We came to understand as we watched you fight for the country under that hopeless situation. That you are a hero!

"D-did you now!? ... huh?"

By the time he noticed it, everyone told him they didn't have to be number one. Millia burst into laughter.

"Aleist, you sure are loved."

But Aleist,

"Now wait! I'll be very upfront here, I can't love you all equally, and there's someone I'm in love with—"

"Even so!"

His harem members' faces were serious.

(I-inconceivable. Don't have to be loved? Don't have to be number one...? That's just wrong, that's just crazy!)

Aleist jumped out of the window in a half-laughing frenzy.

"I'm sorry, it's impossible for me!"

Was it impossible to marry Fina, or impossible to accept his harem... he couldn't accept either.

## Chapter 166: Dragoon

Having fled the sickroom with Izumi, Rudel looked over the sky from Sakuya's back.

Her four wings drawing grand arcs, Sakuya soared through the wide-open sky. A dragon's body was protected by magic, letting a human endure even at high altitudes.

Izumi sat on Sakuya's back, her back turned towards Rudel.

Rudel sat with his back pressed against hers.

"Izumi, cheer up already."

There, Izumi raised a bashful, embarrassed voice.

"You said you'd think of the words to confess. I haven't heard those words yet!"

Hearing that, Rudel was surprised at first, but then he laughed. He laughed, and drove Sakuya to plunge into a cloud.

"Whoa!"

Once they breached the clouds, Izumi felt a slight chill over her body. A layer of dampness rested on her skin and hair.

Sakuya led the two further and further into the sky, below them a carpet of clouds unfolding.

Rudel lifted Izumi up and held her tight.

"I like you, I've fallen in love with you! But I don't know if I can make you happy. For just as much as I love you... more than that, I'm in love with this sky."

Boldly, Rudel divulged his true feelings. Izumi nodded.

"I know. It was always your dream to fly on a dragon's back. I've heard that time and again."

But in five years at the academy—Izumi who'd spend those days with him had come to sympathize with Rudel's feelings.

“If you said I was number one, I’d be doubtful.”

Rudel spoke.

“How cruel. But still, I want you. I fought with my life on the line. No one will mind if there’s just one thing I have freedom over.”

There was no telling what was to come. Courtois was in great turmoil, and it was possible that Fina would be enthroned as queen.

Disposing of the nobles who raise an insurrection, and as this was the first the empire had ever cornered them so far, military reforms would be needed as well.

No, first and foremost, the country of Courtois itself needed reform.

“Just one, eh. Do what you want. I’ll just follow along.”

As Izumi hugged Rudel back, Sakuya gave a bashful roar. It was as if she was congratulating them, and she sounded exceptionally happy.

And just like that, the dragon swooped down, piercing through the sheet of clouds.



After escaping from the sickroom, Aleist met up with Eunius and Luecke.

Before long, they were drowning their cares at the tavern.

“I can’t do it! That many women is impossible, I tell you!”

He said with a sip, his form prostrate over the table unthinkable of the black knight

“I told them to give up on me. Somehow that increased their numbers. And then comes the throne! It’s inconceivable!”

He proclaimed he would throw everything away, and lost all the cheats he had been blessed with. He lost his unnatural level of charm, he no longer had the talent or mana he had before.

But there were more women around Aleist than ever before.

Eunius and Luecke pat his shoulder to console him.

“Hey, do your best. We’ll do our best to not cause you trouble. Rather, I kinda think it’s not your fault this time. So have at it, your highness.”

“Good for you. If you attain kingship, then no matter who gets thrown into your harem. Queen Fina’s at the top. You’ll never have to worry about ranking.”

Aleist raised his face.

“Don’t give up! You’re all for forcing it on me, aren’t you!”

Eunius scoffed.

“Hah! No shit Sherlock. Who in their right mind would willingly take power in this pain-in-the-ass postwar period? What’s more, we’re definitely entering a pain-in-the-ass era after that.”

The Kingdom of Courtois was trying to change. No, it had no choice but to change. At the same time, what would become of their enemy, the empire... there was a mountain of problems.

The work required would be incomparable to peace times. Both future archdukes fully understood that when they fled from the throne.

But Luecke breathed a sigh.

“From my point of view, Rudel was better off King. Considering my marriage with Lena, that would let me welcome her as the legal wife instead of a mistress... hah.”

While he sighed, his reasons were solely for self-interest. Aleist clung in tears to the man who wouldn’t even bring up the country’s distress as a formality.

“Didn’t you used to go on about nobility or something!? Then save me. Fulfill your duty as a noble and save me!”

Luecke removed Aleist’s hand and smoothed out his clothes. Albeit, he was dressed in an infirmary gown.

“You fool. You’re just as much a noble yourself. Do something about it on your own... wait, I’ve got it!”

Aleist and Eunius glanced at Luecke.

But the idea that hit him—

“I can just take her as a mistress, and not marry a legal wife. In that instance, for all intents and purposes, wouldn’t the mistress be the legal wife!?”

— Was about Lena.

Aleist removed his eyes, Eunius sipped his ale. In a “this guy’s hopeless” sort of air, the two opted to just ignore the man.

(So it’s true how they say there’s a paper-thin line between idiot and genius.)

Eunius poured some ale into Aleist’s glass.

“Well, you know. Break a leg.”

After downing the freshly-poured liquid, Aleist spoke.

“This is messed up!”



“Those bloody fools, I’m never gonna forgive them!”

Briskly proceeding her preparations, Fina had put her all into laying the groundwork so she could be enthroned as queen. She was needlessly proficient, and in abilities alone, Fina was the one worthy of the position.

However, the problem lay within.

She had already prepared the papers and was arranging to distribute them to the relevant divisions.

“Just you watch. When I’m queen, I’m dismantling those pesky dragoons of yours! Fwahahahah, I can see my master, crying, begging for forgiveness!”

Looking at Fina were Sophina and Mii.

Seeing her expressionlessly accomplished one job after the next, all while swearing vengeance, they were somewhat creeped out.

Mii spoke.

“Princess, I mean your majesty, don’t you think that’s a bit much.”

Fina looked at her.

“Oh, what’s wrong? It’s alright, Mii... if he cries and grovels, he can have my forgiveness.”

Sophina sounded fed-up.

“No, that’s the same as saying you won’t forgive otherwise. Rather, to be serious for a second...”

Seriously speaking, with the Diade and Halbades Houses assisting her during the time of Aileen’s insurrection, whether she wanted to carry out reform or anything else, she was unable to slight either house.

Moreover, she didn’t hold enough power to do so.

“Goddammit! It’s because these archdukes exist that Courtois’ national power was shaved away! Quit screwing with me, bring out the manager! In this scenario, should we be centralizing power!? You think the empire’s going to wait!?”

Mii tilted her head.

“Umm, but I heard the empire was considerably exhausted in this loss.”

At Mii’s inquisitive gesture, Fina loosed a satisfied drool in her head. And she began speaking in regards to that.

“For now, that is. But just you wait, give them a decade, a century. Their national power will plummet, the way they’re going, either civil war or separation, the empire’s going to change. You think they’re guaranteed to change for the worse? I hate that sort of wishful thinking.”

Sophina spoke to Fina.

“In that case, shouldn’t we launch something from our side—”

“You fool!”

Fina hit her on the head. The high knight’s eyes turned teary.

“We don’t have hands to send around as it is! The country’s in tatters, and there’s absolutely no merit in stealing the barren wastelands of the empire! What I’m trying to say is that their side is the one with all the pieces in place for proper reform!”

How much time and energy did they have to deal with the movements of surrounding powers while proceeding reform in the country? The larger the

country was, the greater hassle it was to govern its landmass.

With this as an opportunity, there may be lords scheming to gain independence.

“Even if we get rid of as many of those who sided with sister’s rebellion as possible, and increase the kingdom’s national power... AAaaah!! My head hurts!”

Fina’s desire to marry Rudel wasn’t just only of self-interest.

Forming a composition with the nation’s strongest force-Rudel- by her side would be a nightmare to the others.

With Ruel’s strength backing her, it was her aim to force her reforms through.

“... But I, Fina Courtois! I shall be one to stand tall through such times of troubles! I’ll get master on his knees!”

Seeing her return to work with those words, Mii and Fina shook their heads.

At the end, Mii,

“On the contrary, why is it I get the feeling her majesty’s the one who’s going to be groveling to Rudel-san...”

She said, but Fina didn’t hear.



A few years later.

Rudel stood on the soil Askewell had once invaded and brought to ruin.

By the current Queen Fina’s new policies, a majority of nobles were to relinquish their land to the state, instead living in the center off an annual pay from the kingdom.

A portion of those who opposed were ordered to change territories to the border, and Rudel was there on a mission as a dispatch from the capital.

The renewed fortress had ten dragoon knights stationed.

The empire had fallen into civil war, its division giving rise to the birth and fall of many new countries, and in the midst of that struggle, there were many who



marched to claim Courtois' land.

At times, there would be strife with nobles in his own country plotting rebellion against Fina, giving him no shortage of work.

While his life had grown hectic, Rudel was busy in the dragon stables washing Sakuya's back with a deck brush, humming a merry tune. Sakuya looked quite comfortable.

His subordinate, a new dragoon called over to him.

"More letters, Castellan. From her majesty, the capital's black knight, and the Diade House and Halbades House... that's an amazing assortment."

Castellan was Rudel's station. While fulfilling the role of a dragoon, he was concurrently the one in charge of the fort.

After jumping down from Sakuya, Rudel accepted the letters and unsealed them on the spot.

"I don't really care about Fina's. Eunius wants to go drinking, Luecke... oh, his first child! So Lena's a mother now. But does he really plan on not having a legal wife?"

The letter from the queen was a lengthy apology and a plea urging him to return to the center. Rudel personally preferred the border to the center, the letter hit all the usual points, so he immediately read through it and quickly lost interest.

Eunius was an invite to the town, while Luecke reported in great joy how a child had been born.

"Now then, Aleist is... I-I see."

According to Aleist's letter, for some reason, his harem members increased and breached thirty. With so many children, he had no idea what to do at this point, or so his screams of anguish were spelled out in paper.

As to be expected, Rudel had no idea what to write back.

"He has it rough. I guess I'll consult with Izumi and write up a reply."

Rudel's subordinate looked at him with a sigh.

“Castellan, if you return to the capital, you’ll be assigned a considerable status. Are you sure you won’t go back? I don’t see anything stopping you.”

While Rudel was in charge of the fort, he would have preferred it if he could assume his duties as a single knight. He even thought he had too many unnecessary duties.

Normally, anyone would want a promotion and a station at the center. But Rudel couldn’t discern any value in that. He had gone as far as to push the status of Arses House head onto his younger brother Chlust he held far too little interest in status or promotion.

“I’m not interested. If you can fly through the sky, everywhere’s pretty much the same. As long as I’ve got Sakuya and my wife, it doesn’t matter where I am.”

Hearing those words, Sakuya delightfully groaned.

His subordinate shrugged his shoulders.

“Bragging? I just think it’s a waste. You should be aiming higher.”

Rudel smiled. From his subordinate’s point of view, life on the border was something he wanted to be done with soon so he could get back to civilization. Rudel had no intent to deny that way of thinking.

Going off of that, the man asked with deep intrigue.

“Come to think of it, there’s a rumor going ‘round that you refused not only your Archduke position but the throne as well, but is that true?”

Leaning the deck brush over his shoulder, Rudel made back towards Sakuya.

“Who knows? I’m not really interested in that sort of thing. For now and forever, I am but—”

Turning back, Rudel smiled.

“A single dragoon.”

## Chapter 167: Epilogue

Several hundred years passed from the time Rudel was in service.

The Kingdom of Courtois left only its name as kings and nobles faded out, the curtain quietly closing on an era.

The forms of the dragoons who once served the country now gone, the view of airships crossing the sky had become standard. With the skies above no longer a land beyond reach, mankind eventually stopped keeping their dragons. The development of technology soon gave rise to propeller planes.

Knight brigades were abolished. Uniform armies became standard, and the know-how to utilize a dragon was lost to time. The dragoons were quick to go. With their high upkeep and the capricious temperament of their mounts, they had become more than they were worth.

Airships, airplanes... once those were in hand, dragons had become unnecessary.

Yet the supreme rulers of the sky still remained, as they had always been, the beasts of legend.



It was only in the past few decades that the vast lands of the dragons' dwellings became a land of dispute among the humans

In a sacred place with a lake, Sakuya watched the small dragons similar to her in appearance playing around her.

Her wings had naturally increased to six, and her large body had grown a size larger. Both the splendid gemstone in her head and her horns had grown, the young spirit she had held in her days with Rudel nowhere to be found.

Sakuya lifted up her head to look at the sky.

She let out a short and loud roar. With that alone, the Dragons' dwellings gradually grew boisterous as dragons took to the air one after the next.

Sakuya too spread her wings to rise up and face her rude uninvited guests

from the country once called the Gaia Empire.

From over thirty airships, the fighter planes took off in orderly succession.

A vast, fertile plot of land, what's more, the Dragons' Dwellings were abundant in natural resources. To humans, dragons were no longer comrades in arms, they had already gotten to recognize them as enemies.

Sakuya looked upon the scene and muttered.

'Have they forgotten what became of the last Courtois Army that tried to invade?'

Wind dragons zoomed between the fighter planes, luring them into a dogfight. One by one, the crafts were shot down to the ground.

The red dragons breathed their fiery breath, sinking the airships behind them. Protruding cannons from their hulls, the airships commenced a bombardment on Sakuya.

The cannon shells failed to scratch her.

Sakuya opened her large mouth, and as her breath was released, it dispersed through the air. The shots assailed airship and airplane alike, bringing them to the ground.

While there were enemies who tried to flee, they were quickly circumvented and crushed.

Similar to Sakuya, a white dragon with four wings approached her.

'Mama, it's over. All that's left is the clean-up.'

Sakuya kept her eyes on the falling crafts as, after a large flap propelling herself up a distance, she took off somewhere.

Perhaps curious, Sakuya's child tagged along.



It was where the capital of the Courtois Kingdom once stood.

Now ruined and abandoned, not a trace of its former glory remained.

Having brought her feet there, Sakuya mimicked a human form as she

descended, her child copying her and changing shape as well.

The form Sakuya took on was as if the once-goddess Sakuya had grown into an adult. Her child boasted the same blue eyes and blond hair-cut short. A blue gemstone embedded in his forehead.

But unlike Sakuya, his hands remained disproportionately large, and it seemed he wasn't yet completely accustomed to taking human form.

"Mama, why did you come here? There haven't been any humans here for quite some time."

"You're right," Sakuya muttered, as she walked through the royal capital buried in rubble and sand.

The reason the capital fell. It all lay in the limits of the Kingdom. The kingdom had welcomed in a golden age under Fina Courtois-the great leader who was said to have rejuvenated the dynasty-alongside her prime minister Luecke Halbades.

But from then on came a slow, gradual decline.

They had their share of wise rulers, but in the end, they launched a war on the dragons, and the capital was destroyed by the force led by Sakuya.

Indeed, the one who burnt it down was Sakuya herself.

As she walked through such a place, from all over, the goblins and orcs showed their faces. They seemed to think of Sakuya in her human form as mere food as they approached.

Those goblins and orcs were cleaved through by a single swing of her child's arm.

"Who do you think you raise your blades against, you lowly curs!?"

Sakuya stopped him from chasing and hunting down the ones who fled.

(... I've gotten more children who think of dragons as the strongest race on earth, looking down on the others.)

In their battles with humans, a greater number of dragons were beginning to think of themselves as the true rulers of the land. It was becoming a large worry

for Sakuya.

Leading her child by the hand, Sakuya headed towards it.

What was once the very center of the city. In a now-broken fountain, with Fina at the center, then Rudel, Aleist, Luecke and Eunius, the statues of those who had contributed to Courtois' heyday.

Sakuya brushed off the dust and sand, cleaning off only that spot to look at the statue of Rudel. It was dubious to say it resembled him to a great degree, but as long as people considered a representation of him, she couldn't treat it poorly.

"... Rudel, I can barely remember your face anymore."

Her memories from her youth gradually faded away.

The time she had spent with Rudel and Izumi, to Sakuya, it was no more than an instant. In the times that followed, after the two had gone, a little while later, Mystith and all the dragons who looked after her were gone as well.

Before she knew it, Sakuya was the one leading the dragons, and their relations with humans were breaking down.

It was all far too painful for her.

The child gazed at Sakuya before looking at the statue,

"I can't believe you ever let some human ride your back. That's crazy."

Sakuya hid her face with her right hand, turning to the child.

"You've never ridden a human on your back before. No, you've never ridden a knight. When dragon and human hearts connect, they become a dragoon. It was once only normal."

The child's cheeks puffed up.

"Humans are incompetents with nothing but numbers. If it were up to us, we'd have burnt them all down."

Sakuya took the words with sorrow; she felt the reality of how wide the gap with humans must have grown for the dragons to develop that mindset.

There, the sky suddenly grew rowdy.

An ominous dark shadow overhead—impossible to make out whether they were living or dead, they had grown in numbers lately, those things that weren't monsters, and one of them was being chased by a fighter plane.

The child shrugged his shoulders.

"One of those bugs that've been multiplying lately? Now that's a good match for those pesky humans."

That ominous something with the form of an arthropod was finally cornered and shot to death by the craft. But the plane was also shot and burst into flames.

"It's going down."

While the fighter plane continued on a downward trajectory somewhere, the pilot jumped from the cockpit with a parachute strapped on.

Oddly enough, right towards where Sakuya was.

As the pilot landed, the parachute draped over him, and as he squirmed his way out of it, he held a pistol in his hand.

The moment before her child swung his arm, Sakuya saw the pilot's face and lowered a fist on her child's head. She lowered it with enough power a vivid clang rung out.

"Mama, that hurt!"

"... I'm sorry. But wait."

If she used only words, then surely the human before her eyes would be dead. The pilot seemed quite bewildered before Sakuya and the child.

He pulled off the helmet covering his head, removed his goggles and spoke. With distinctive silver hair and blue eyes, the pilot kept his pistol at the ready.

"Civilians? You're in quite an odd place for that."

The young man said, looking at the child's large arms and observing the two of them. From a human's eyes, there was no possible way Sakuya would be able to come here as lightly equipped as she was.

But with the young man before her, Sakuya burst into tears.

“A human life is short. But...”

The young man approached, his gun trained on Sakuya. While the child intimidated him, Sakuya held up a hand to put it to a stop.

“Rudel.”

Touching a hand to the young man’s cheek, Sakuya muttered a name. The man seemed quite flustered, he jumped back to take distance.

“You’re not human. A form of monster? Or a new type of bug? Where did you learn my name?”

Hearing it wasn’t just his face but his name as well, Sakuya gave a small smile. She changed to her dragon form on the spot.

Upon seeing that massive dragon, Rudel’s eyes opened in surprise. However, he didn’t show any fear.

He looked on with pure intrigue.

“A dragon!? Moreover, the lord of the Dragon Den!”

Sakuya rested Rudel on her hand and raised him into the sky.

‘I’ll deliver you somewhere close to where humans live. I once rode a fine human on this back. This is the least I could do to return the favor.’

From the palm of her hand, Rudel looked up at Sakuya.

“A dragoon!? I never thought they actually existed... how interesting, then let me ride on your back too.”

How brazen could he be? The child returned to dragon form, flying to Sakuya’s side as he complained at Rudel.

‘Don’t get in over your head, human! Who do you think you’re talking to!? Do you think mama would let a dirty lowlife like you rest on her back!?’

But Sakuya exchanged words with the man.

‘You know of the dragoons, you know of the world, yet still, you wish to ride on my back?’

Rudel struck his right hand to his chest.



“Of course. You’re far stronger than a fighter plane. If I ride you, I can annihilate those blasted bugs!”

Even now, her child was poised to attack at any minute. His fangs bared, his eyes wide open, he would kill the man at the slightest opportunity.

Rudel went on.

“And the small stuff doesn’t really matter. I just want to ride on your back!”

Sakuya laughed.

A human life is short. But they go in cycles... Those were the words of Mystith, who had once lost Marty to gain a new partner in Lena.

Finally understanding what she meant, Sakuya brought her hand to her back and set Rudel onto it.

‘Very well. Then ride me you will... new-age dragoon.’

‘Mama!’ the child cried out.

Once Rudel was on her back, he spread his arms wide and smiled.

“Yes! I feel right at home. Like this, I’ll be able to annihilate any bug that comes my way!”

And so the first dragoon in several hundred years would forge a new legend—but that is another story.